

RICE UNIVERSITY

# **Socratic Influence on the Stoic Epictetus**

By

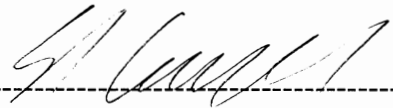
Brandon Mulvey

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF THE ARTS.

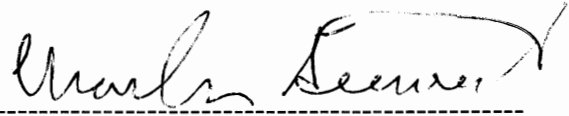
APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

  
-----

Donald Morrison, Professor, Philosophy

  
-----

Steven Crowell, Professor, Chair, Philosophy

  
-----

Charles Siewert, Professor, Philosophy

Houston, Texas

December, 2010

## **Abstract**

### **Socratic Influence on the Stoic Epictetus**

Brandon Mulvey

The primary aim of this project is to examine the nature of Socrates' influence on the Stoic Epictetus. While Plato's Socrates certainly influenced Epictetus, the Socrates portrayed in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* plays an even larger role in shaping the Socrates Epictetus seeks to imitate. This claim will be substantiated by drawing close parallels between passages in Epictetus' *Discourses* and *Handbook* and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. The discussion here demonstrates that Epictetus' methodology is a reflection of Xenophon's approach, characterized by committed doctrines and proscriptive advice giving, rather than the searching dialectical approach ending with negative results found in Plato's Socratic dialogues. I begin by examining A.A. Long's claim that it is Plato's Socrates that Epictetus emulates, and providing a critical analysis of this argument. I then argue that the methodology of Epictetus' *Discourses*, as well as the content and subject matter, are inspired by Xenophon's Socrates.

**Table of Contents:**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <i>Introduction</i>   | 4  |
| <i>Outline of Opposing Argument &amp; Historical Background</i> | 5  |
| <i>A.A. Long's Point A &amp; Response</i>                       | 11 |
| <i>Point B &amp; Response</i>                                   | 15 |
| <i>Point C &amp; Response</i>                                   | 20 |
| <i>Point D &amp; Response</i>                                   | 25 |
| <i>Point E &amp; Response</i>                                   | 29 |
| <i>Point F &amp; Response</i>                                   | 31 |
| <i>Point G &amp; Response</i>                                   | 33 |
| <i>Socratic elenchus in the Discourses</i>                      | 37 |
| <i>Direct Referencing of Xenophon</i>                           | 49 |
| <i>On Emotion</i>   | 51 |
| <i>On Material Possessions</i>                                  | 53 |

|                                 |    |
|---------------------------------|----|
| <i>On Freedom</i>               | 54 |
| <i>On Self-Control</i>          | 55 |
| <i>On Training and Practice</i> | 57 |
| <i>On Friendship</i>            | 61 |
| <i>On Providence</i>            | 68 |
| <i>On Death</i>                 | 74 |
| <i>Conclusion</i>               | 77 |
| <i>Bibliography</i>             | 80 |

## Introduction

The primary aim of this project is to elucidate the nature of Socrates' influence on the Stoic Epictetus. The claim will be advanced that, while the Socrates of early Platonic dialogues had a significant influence on Epictetus' unique contributions to Stoic philosophy, the Socrates portrayed in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* plays an even larger role in shaping the Socrates Epictetus seeks to imitate both in his method and in the focus of his work. This claim will be substantiated by drawing close parallels between passages in Epictetus' *Discourses* and *Handbook* and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. The discussion here seeks to demonstrate that Epictetus' methodology is a reflection of Xenophon's approach, which is characterized by committed doctrines and proscriptive advice giving, rather than the searching dialectical approach ending with negative results found in Plato's Socratic dialogues.

I begin by examining A.A. Long's claim that it is the Socrates of Plato's dialogues that Epictetus emulates, and providing a critical analysis of this argument<sup>1</sup>. I then turn to making the case that Xenophon's Socrates strongly influences Epictetus. First, I argue that, methodologically, Epictetus imitates Socrates as presented by Xenophon in particular through portraying Socrates as a guide who offers proscriptive insight into the nature of knowledge. Then I demonstrate that the content and subject matter, in addition to the methodology, of Epictetus' *Discourses* also strongly reflects that found in Xenophon. The claim is bolstered by examining the material dedicated to training, self-improvement, and humble approaches to living featured in Xenophon's Socratic works and the *Discourses*. The aim is to show the two bear such similarity that

---

<sup>1</sup> This argument is found in Chapter 3 of Long's *Epictetus* (Oxford, 2002), entitled "The Socratic Paradigm".

Xenophon's picture of Socrates is quite likely the main influence on Epictetus. Thus, I propose that, contrary to the accepted view of Epictetus' influences, Epictetus' body of work must be reconsidered in light of Xenophon's work.

As a precautionary measure, I must stress that attempting to demonstrate irrefutable evidence that Epictetus has been absolutely and unquestionably influenced directly by either Plato's Socrates or Xenophon's Socrates is an insurmountable task. The reason for this is that Epictetus' contributions to philosophy are the product of influence of all of his predecessors to some degree or another. Both Long and I agree that the uniqueness of Epictetus' approach is that it is Socratic; the disagreement on my part is that Long argues the Socrates Epictetus has in mind is the one presented by Plato, whereas I feel Epictetus' Socrates is a composite of both Plato's and Xenophon's and, as I argue, more of the latter than the former. Some thematic parallels I draw in attempting to establish this might be labeled as common Stoic property in the realm of ideas, however, I would argue that the origin of these ideas still goes back to the Socrates presented by Plato and Xenophon. Again, an attempt to establish this beyond question would be impossible; direct evidence of Epictetus' Stoic predecessors is too fragmentary to make a compelling argument. Instead, I wish to show that, placed side by side, the influence of Socrates on Epictetus shines through, even if it was passed down through other sources. Thus the two sources I find most relevant, and the only two concerns over time and space allow me to consider here, are precisely Plato and Xenophon.

Long begins his argument by making the uncontroversial claim that Socrates is the primary influence on Epictetus' philosophy, and argues that this influence is clear

because of Epictetus' methodology, and attention to self-examination<sup>2</sup>. Within this paper, the term "methodology" will be used to refer to the means by which knowledge is imparted by a particular author to the audience. It is the source of Epictetus' methodology, and the nature of it, that, I contend, should be controversial. Long claims that both Epictetus' and Socrates' methodology consists of dialectic: "the great interest and distinctiveness of...Epictetus' dependence and reflection on Socrates, consist in the way the discourses appropriate and adapt Socratic dialectic; by which I mean the conversation Socrates practices in Plato's dialogues, including interpersonal discussion by question and answer, exposure of ignorance and inconsistency by means of the elenchus, and irony"<sup>3</sup>. I aim to dispute this claim, but first the case he makes for the above assertion must be examined.

While I do not disagree with Long that Epictetus is not interested in Plato's own philosophy but instead sees him as a reliable source, reporting on the philosophy of Socrates himself, I propose that his further claim that Plato's works are, "the richest source on Socrates' life, thought and conversation" is certainly a debatable point<sup>4</sup>. There is no absolute consensus among modern scholars concerning whether the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues represents an accurate portrayal of the real Socrates' "life, thought, and conversation," rather than a character by which Plato presents his own philosophical explorations. I argue that Xenophon is an important reporter of the

---

<sup>2</sup> "it is Socrates who primarily authorizes everything Epictetus is trying to give his students in terms of **philosophical methodology, self-examination, and a life model for them to imitate**" 66

<sup>3</sup> 68

<sup>4</sup> 69

historical Socrates and that some features of his Socrates survive and are represented, hundreds of years later, in the writing of Epictetus<sup>5</sup>.

Dorion traces the history of the dismissal of Xenophon to an origin in the work of Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher describes a method for discerning the true Socrates by stating: “the only safe method (*Der einzige sichere Weg*) seems to be, to inquire: what may Socrates have been, over and above what Xenophon has described, without however contradicting the strokes of character (*Charakterzügen*), and the practical maxims (*Lebensmaximen*), which Xenophon distinctly delivers as those of Socrates: and what must he have been, to give Plato a right, and an inducement, to exhibit him as he has done in his dialogues? (1879: 14 = 1818: 59)”. Dorion retorts: “This “method” raises more problems than it can possibly hope to resolve. As far as the “practical maxims” or the “rules of life” (*Lebensmaximen*) are concerned, a single example will suffice to illustrate the pitfalls...of Schleiermacher’s...method. Book IV, Chapter 5 of the *Memorabilia* is devoted to the way in which Socrates assisted his companions in regulating their behavior...it appears [here] that self-mastery (*enkrateia*) is the surest foundation for behavior and action. If self-mastery is the *sine qua non* condition for all successful practical activity, it is hardly surprising that Xenophon affirms that *enkrateia* is the foundation of virtue (*Memorabilia* 1.5.4). Must we consider, then, that the principal role attributed to *enkrateia* has the value of a “practical maxim”? If so, Xenophon’s account would have precedence over Plato’s....In fact, since Plato’s Socrates grants no theoretical importance to *enkrateia* – the term *enkrateia* is not found in Plato’s first dialogues,...and because he attributes to knowledge the role that Xenophon

---

<sup>5</sup> For more on this topic, see Dorion 2010.



attributes to *enkrateia*, his position appears irreconcilable with a practical maxim defended by Xenophon's Socrates and must, in accordance with Schleiermacher's method, be sacrificed. As can be seen, this "method" leads to results that are at times contrary....The difficulties raised by this method notwithstanding, it did exert exceptional programmatic influence.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding Plato scholars, he states that Schleiermacher's example "points out the dissension even among Plato scholars: The case of Plato's account especially highlights the absence of consensus; if we consider only those commentators who are inclined to grant priority to Plato's dialogues, we notice that they do not turn to the same dialogues to reconstruct the historical Socrates' theories. Some rely mostly on the *Apology*, many base their work on the entirety of the early dialogues<sup>7</sup>, or on just a few of them, others still call on the apocryphal dialogues<sup>8</sup>, and finally some consider that every word that Plato put in Socrates' mouth, whether in an early, middle, or late dialogue, has a place in the record of the historical Socrates<sup>9</sup>. It is quite surprising that there is no consensus regarding the number and identity of Plato's dialogues that would allow for the reconstruction of the historical Socrates' ideas, but, in another way, this disagreement among interpreters is inevitable because of the doctrinal heterogeneity of Socrates' character in the *corpus platonicum*<sup>10</sup>". I will expand upon this counter-claim below, after first deconstructing the argument of A.A. Long.

---

<sup>6</sup> See the numerous references given by Dorion 2000, p. XIII n.2.

<sup>7</sup> See Maier 1913; Guthrie 1975, p. 67; Vlastos 1991, pp. 45-50; Graham 1992; Brickhouse & Smith 2000, pp. 44-49; 2003, pp. 112-113.

<sup>8</sup> See Tarrant 1938.

<sup>9</sup> This is the position defended by Taylor (1911, p. IX) and Burnet (1911; 1914).

<sup>10</sup> Montuori (1981, p. 225): "It is important to underline that Plato does not give us a single image of Socrates, coherent and complete, but a disconcerting plurality of images, all of which have been noted by the critics, who in turn have taken one or the other as the most faithful description of the historical person of Sophroniscus' son." See also p. 226.

The “Socratic Paradigm”, Long’s chapter outlining his claims regarding the relationship between the Platonic Socrates and Epictetus’ Socrates, includes a number of claims which are potentially problematic. First, Long argues that Socrates’ portrayal in Epictetus’ writing as a figure who relies upon reason in all elements of his life. However, a quote from the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon’s principal text, placed parallel to Long’s quotes shows that characterizing Socrates as one who lived by reason alone is not unique to Plato. Quote 18 in Long’s text is drawn from Epictetus’ *Manual*: “Socrates fulfilled himself by attending to nothing except reason in everything he encountered...”<sup>11</sup>. Xenophon, however also portrays a striking similar vision of Socrates: “musn’t it be reasonable to describe me as wise, seeing that, ever since I began to understand speech, I have never stopped investigating and learning any good thing that I could”<sup>12</sup>. Additionally, Long argues that the positioning of these quotes at the end of the *Manual* by Arrian “reflect[s] Epictetus’ priorities”. This claim does not appear to make a great deal of sense; one must remember that the actual author of the *Manual* is Arrian, producing a summary of his own longer recordings of Epictetus’ teaching in the *Discourses*.

Leaping to conclusions about Epictetus’ priorities is inappropriate, as Arrian is simply summarizing, and no hierarchical ordering of priorities on Epictetus’ part can be inferred from the positioning chosen by another. Though some may argue that Long’s portrayal of Epictetus as drawing explicitly from Plato due to his interpretation of Socrates as reliant upon reason, this argument is neither precise nor watertight. This is because Xenophon, who was writing at roughly the same time as Plato, also forwards the

---

<sup>11</sup> Long 69

<sup>12</sup> Xen. Apol. 45

same portrayal of Socrates. Long's framing of these passages as reflecting Epictetus' priorities is largely meaningless since Epictetus' own priorities cannot be discerned accurately from Arrian's writings. He simply did not order Epictetus' arguments in a systematic manner.

A similar issue to the one presented above is found in Long's critique of Epictetus' presentation of one of the most famous doctrines attributable to Socrates. Epictetus writes that, "in the case of theory it is easy to examine and refute an ignorant person, but in the business of life no one submits to such testing and we hate the one who puts us through it....But Socrates used to say that an unexamined life is not worth living<sup>13</sup>. Long argues that this is drawn from "one of the most memorable of Socrates' concluding sentences from the *Apology*"<sup>14</sup>. This has a close parallel in Xenophon's own *Apology*, where he presents Socrates as saying "musn't it be reasonable to describe me as wise, seeing that, ever since I began to understand speech, I have never stopped investigating and learning any good thing I could"<sup>15</sup>. Here Xenophon is emphasizing that Socrates is defending his life as an *examined* life<sup>16</sup>. Thus again we are presented with a case where what Long presents as unique to Plato's Socrates is present in Xenophon as well, and the inspiration for Epictetus could have been drawn equally from either, or more likely, both.

In addition to these passages, Long supports his central claim in Chapter 3 that the Socratic dialectic found in Plato is closely emulated by Epictetus through the use of a series of passages in Epictetus' writing which he sees as parallel to Plato's writings. He

---

<sup>13</sup> Disc. 1.26.17-18 – as Long points out reiterated again at 3.12.15

<sup>14</sup> Long 70

<sup>15</sup> Apol. 12-20 p. 45

<sup>16</sup> demonstrated by his disdain for akrasia, in tune with necessities of his life- that others come to learn from him if they make virtue their goal etc

presents seven propositions from Plato's *Gorgias* and provides what he asserts are parallel and nearly identical passages in Epictetus' *Discourses*. This is problematic, in the first place, because Long neglects to complete a detailed analysis of why he believes the passages to be such close parallels. Additionally, he presents these propositions as irrefutable proof that the source for Epictetus' writings is Plato alone. However, my aim will be to more closely analyze the passages Long chose as well as to provide parallels in Xenophon that are equally likely or even more likely to have inspired Epictetus. Although it is certainly possible that Epictetus does at some point rely solely on Plato's dialogues as his inspiration, I do not find this to be the case for any of Long's seven propositions.

**[A.] Nothing is worse than false beliefs about goodness and justice. (458a; Epictetus 1.11.11)**

The first proposition forwarded by Long surrounds the concept of false beliefs. Long argues that Epictetus is drawing directly upon Plato and is emulating Socrates when he writes:

Καὶ μὴν τὸ μὲν τῶν χρωμάτων καὶ ὁσμῶν, ἔτι δὲ χυλῶν κριτήριον  
ἀγνοεῖν τυχὸν οὐ μεγάλη ζημία, τὸ δὲ τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ τῶν κακῶν καὶ τῶν κατὰ  
φύσιν καὶ παρὰ φύσιν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ δοκεῖ σοι μικρὰ ζημία εἶναι τῷ  
ἀγνοοῦντι; [12] — Ἡ μεγίστη μὲν οὖν<sup>17</sup>

“And yet, to be ignorant of the criterion for colours, or smells, or tastes, might perhaps be no very great loss. But do you think he suffers only a small loss who is

<sup>17</sup> Epicteti Dissertationes ab Arriano digestae. Epictetus. Heinrich Schenkl. editor. Leipzig. B. G. Teubner. 1916.

ignorant of what is good and evil, and natural and unnatural, to man? No the very greatest”<sup>18</sup>

To support his position, Long cites Plato’s *Gorgias*:

[458a] ἐγὼ οὖν, εἰ μὲν καὶ σὺ εἴ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὥνπερ καὶ ἐγώ, ἡδέως ἂν σε διερωτῶην εἰ δὲ μή, ἐώην ἂν. ἐγὼ δὲ τίνων εἰμί; τῶν ἡδέως μὲν ἂν ἐλεγχθέντων εἴ τι μὴ ἀληθὲς λέγω, ἡδέως δ’ ἂν ἐλεγχάντων εἴ τις τι μὴ ἀληθὲς λέγοι, οὐκ ἀηδέστερον μεντᾶν ἐλεγχθέντων ἢ ἐλεγχάντων: μεῖζον γὰρ αὐτὸ ἀγαθὸν ἡγοῦμαι, ὅσῳπερ μεῖζον ἀγαθὸν ἐστὶν αὐτὸν ἀπαλλαγῆναι κακοῦ τοῦ μεγίστου ἢ ἄλλον ἀπαλλάξαι. οὐδὲν γὰρ οἶμαι τοσοῦτον κακὸν εἶναι ἀνθρώπῳ, ὅσον δόξα “What kind of man am I? One of those who would be pleased to be refuted if I say something untrue, and pleased to refute if someone else does, yet not at all less pleased to be refuted than to refute. For I think that being refuted is a greater good, in so far as it is a greater good for a man to get rid of the greatest badness himself than to rid someone else of it; for I think there is no badness for a man as great as a false belief about the things which our discussion is about now”<sup>19</sup>.

While these passages share some similarities, they are not, in fact, precisely parallel. Specifically, Plato’s quote incorporates the notion of “false beliefs” explicitly, while Epictetus focuses more broadly on ignorance, which may or may not actually incorporate a false belief or, may rather, simply be a lack of knowledge, holding no belief one way or the other about a topic. Long assumes that Epictetus drew solely on Plato, however in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* is present what is, I assert, an even more exact parallel to Epictetus’s writings.

<sup>18</sup> Disc. 1.11.11

<sup>19</sup> 458a – Long’s translation p. 71-2

First, Xenophon presents Socrates as saying: “Don’t you think that self-indulgence debars people from wisdom, which is the greatest good, and drives them into the opposite state?”<sup>20</sup> Xenophon’s use of the term “wisdom” is more directly related to Epictetus’ use of the term ignorance than Plato’s more limited reference to false beliefs; ignorance is lack of any wisdom of the good, a negation of the greatest good being the greatest harm. Xenophon continues, writing: “Don’t you think that, by dragging them off in pursuit of pleasure, it prevents them from studying and apprehending their real interests; and that it often confuses their perception of good and bad and makes them choose the worse instead of the better?”<sup>21</sup> Xenophon’s referencing the confusion between good and bad reflects quite closely Epictetus’ concept of ignorance of good and evil. Thus, while Long frames his argument regarding this portion of Epictetus’ writing as focusing on false beliefs, this may be a misinterpretation. In fact, it appears that Epictetus may have, additionally, drawn upon Xenophon, who presents a picture of the dangers of self-indulgence to wisdom when he states “when you are struck by the impression of some pleasure, guard yourself, as with impressions generally, against being carried away by it”<sup>22</sup>.

The points made here is that the false belief that doing what “one sees fit” (from Plato below) or to put it more plainly, self-indulging, is the worst thing one can do; this also means one must have false beliefs about what is good because indulgence drags one away from one’s true interests.

---

<sup>20</sup> 4.5.8

<sup>21</sup> 4.5.8

<sup>22</sup> Handbook 34

Now let us more closely examine the original Greek in the two passages, in order to determine whether Epictetus may have been guided by the terminology and manner of expression Plato's Socrates actually uses.

The key passage from the *Gorgias* is as follows:

οὐδὲν γὰρ οἶμαι τοσοῦτον κακὸν εἶναι ἀνθρώπῳ, ὅσον δόξα<sup>23</sup>

The entirety of the Epictetus passage is relevant here, and bears repeating:

Καὶ μὴν τὸ μὲν τῶν χρωμάτων καὶ ὁσμῶν, ἔτι δὲ χυλῶν κριτήριον ἀγνοεῖν τυχὸν οὐ μεγάλη ζημία, τὸ δὲ τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ τῶν κακῶν καὶ τῶν κατὰ φύσιν καὶ παρὰ φύσιν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ δοκεῖ σοι μικρὰ ζημία εἶναι τῷ ἀγνοοῦντι; [12] — Ἡ μεγίστη μὲν οὖν

A cursory glance might lead one to think the subject matter here is largely the same, however in the *Gorgias* quote it is false δόξα, or opinion, that is considered by Plato's Socrates to be the source of greatest harm. In other words, treating false beliefs as knowledge is most harmful. The harm in the Epictetus quote is not having a κριτήριον (criterion) of knowledge. He first asserts that lacking a criterion of trivial sensibles is perchance not a great harm, τυχὸν οὐ μεγάλη ζημία, and then continues on to ask "and of the good and the of the bad etc...". The implication here and the use of the genitive indicates he must be implying lacking the criterion of these is the source of harm that his conversant affirms is the greatest. The crucial difference here is this focus on a criterion. For Epictetus this is something one can come to possess, something that Plato's Socrates never arrives at in any of the early dialogues. Thus one can see why the Academic skeptics took to heart the message and the stance that the greatest harm one can suffer is

<sup>23</sup> Plato. *Platonis Opera*, ed. John Burnet. Oxford University Press. 1903. *Gorgias* 458a6

to falsely treat something as knowledge, whereas for Epictetus and other Stoics the greatest harm is not firmly grasping the criterion which allows one to make judgments and possess knowledge. Possessing this κριτήριον, of the good and the bad, τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ τῶν κακῶν, and what is according to nature, κατὰ φύσιν, is a real possibility both for Xenophon's Socrates and for Epictetus. The different terms used in the passages lends further reason to think that the overall message is also different. If Epictetus was truly following the lead of Plato's Socrates, introducing criterion as a key term and using the infinitive ἄγνοεῖν to state what one does, while nowhere mentioning δόξα, makes little sense. We should not always expect a philosopher working hundreds of years beyond his sources to exactly paraphrase his influences, however, I would argue that Epictetus' terminology as a distinct departure with an implied telos being advocated, namely, obtaining the elusive and necessary criterion.

**[B.] It is worse to do wrong than to suffer wrong. (474c ff.; Epictetus 4.1.122-3)**

Long furthers his argument that Epictetus drew solely on Plato when citing passages about Socrates' teachings on suffering wrong. The passage in question from Epictetus is as follows: "So also with man....What then is his nature? To bite and kick and throw people into prison and behead them? No; but to do good, to cooperate with others, and to pray for their good. 'Did not Socrates, then, fare badly? No; but his judges and accusers'" <sup>24</sup> The wording Long draws on from Plato is: "Socrates: "...which do you think is more shameful, doing what's unjust or suffering it? Tell me. Polus: Doing it. Socrates: Now if doing it is in fact more shameful, isn't it also worse? Polus: No, not in

---

<sup>24</sup> 4.1.122-3.



the least. Socrates: I see. Evidently you don't believe that admirable and good are the same, or that bad and shameful are"<sup>25</sup>. While this passage does bear some similarity to Epictetus' passage, Plato is not the only source presenting a Socrates who would rather suffer than do wrong. In fact, Xenophon begins his *Apology* by relating a discourse between Socrates and Hermogenes on the subject of preparing a defense. Hermogenes rebukes Socrates for not having done so. Socrates replies that the entirety of his life has, in fact, been a defense. When Hermogenes asks how this could be so, Socrates replies, "because I have consistently done no wrong, and this, I think, is the finest preparation for a defense"<sup>26</sup>. He continues by emphasizing he has lived the best kind of life, stating, "I have lived my whole life respecting the gods and acting morally towards men"<sup>27</sup>. From this it can be clearly inferred that Xenophon's Socrates holds to the same ideal as that presented in Epictetus: that focusing on doing good alone, here represented by living a life in which one does no wrong, and further, acts morally towards gods and men.

If the best defense Socrates, as presented by Xenophon, can muster and with which he sums up his life is that he is consistent about not acting wrongly and instead acts morally, clearly he holds Long's ideal, that it is worse to do wrong than to suffer wrong, to be a paramount principle. He further challenges Hermogenes to find anyone who has lived a better life than he, given that he has guided himself in this manner. If the best kind of life is the one Socrates describes as his own and also involves respecting providence, one can conclude that this is what Socrates sees as being a natural life for man, the focus of Epictetus' passage. Given the two accounts from Xenophon and Plato

---

<sup>25</sup> 474c

<sup>26</sup> 41

<sup>27</sup> 42

respectively, it would seem that Xenophon's is the closer, especially as it is related to his trial, whereas the quote from Plato is not.

Furthermore, Xenophon also writes: "Socrates: 'take the case of those who deceive their friends to their detriment...which is the worse morally, to do it voluntarily or involuntarily?' Euthyd.: '...take that I say that voluntary is worse than involuntary deception'"<sup>28</sup>. Deception of one's friends and in doing so harming them voluntarily is undoubtedly antithetical to Epictetus' claim that the nature of man is to cooperate and help his fellow man, and as harming one's friend involuntarily is deemed by Xenophon's Socrates morally wrong but only less so, he is in agreement with Epictetus that harming another is unnatural and morally wrong. Thus, again, where Long frames the passages he draws upon as being clearly drawn only from Plato, examining these passages as well as similar passages in Xenophon's writing cast doubt upon this premise.

A closer examination of the cited passages in the Greek reveals a disparity between the passages from Plato and Epictetus and a parity between the passage from Epictetus and another passage from Xenophon.

The key passage from Plato reads:

**Σωκράτης**

τί δὲ δὴ; αἴσχιον πότερον τὸ ἀδικεῖν ἢ τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι; ἀποκρίνου.

**Πῶλος**

τὸ ἀδικεῖν

The key passage from Epictetus reads:

---

<sup>28</sup> Mem. 4.2

[122] ὥσαύτως. οὐκοῦν καὶ ἄνθρωπος. τίς οὖν αὐτοῦ ἡ φύσις; δάκνειν καὶ  
 λακτίζειν καὶ εἰς φυλακὴν βάλλειν καὶ ἀποκεφαλίζειν; οὐ: ἀλλ' εὖ ποιεῖν  
 συνεργεῖν, ἐπεύχεσθαι. τότε οὖν κακῶς πράσσει, ἂν τε θέλῃς ἂν τε μή, ὅταν  
 ἀγνωμονῇ.

Ὡστε Σωκράτης οὐκ ἔπραξε κακῶς; [123] — Οὐ, ἀλλ' οἱ δικάσταί καὶ οἱ  
 κατηγοροί. — Οὐδ' ἐν Ῥώμῃ Ἑλουίδιος; — Οὐ, ἀλλ' ὁ ἀποκτείνας αὐτόν. —  
 Πῶς λέγεις;

The language used by Socrates in the passage from Plato is markedly different from that in the passage by Epictetus. In the Plato passage, the notion is clearly one of committing injustice or suffering it: τὸ ἀδικεῖν ἢ τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι. In the Epictetus passage the emphasis is again on what is done right by nature, κατὰ φύσιν, and further, stresses working together, συνεργεῖν, and to pray for the well being of others, ἐπεύχεσθαι. The focus on nature is uniquely Stoic, doing injustice is not even discussed. I cannot agree that Epictetus' use of εὖ ποιεῖν for to do well, and κακῶς πράσσει, for to do evil are perfectly opposite and perfectly symmetrical, respectively, to the use of τὸ ἀδικεῖν ἢ τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι from the Plato. The former do have moral implications, but the latter are clearly meant to be used and understood in a technical sense in their relation to virtue. I would argue that it is implausible even an author working from memory would choose the former if they mean to adhere to inspiration from the latter.

Furthermore, if there is any Socratic source inspiring Epictetus' choice of words, it is far more likely to have been inspired by Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 3.5.16, where Pericles is decrying Socrates' implication that the Athenians do not work together. Here

we again see the use of the key term συνεργεῖν. Although this is not the only term focused on in the Epictetus passage it is arguably thematically the most important. How does one do well, according to Epictetus? Precisely by working together and not harming others; he believes it is the nature of mankind to act in this way.

[16] πότε δὲ οὕτω πείσονται τοῖς ἄρχουσιν, οἳ καὶ ἀγάλλονται ἐπὶ τῷ καταφρονεῖν τῶν ἀρχόντων; ἢ πότε οὕτως ὁμονοήσουσιν, οἳ γε ἀντὶ μὲν τοῦ συνεργεῖν ἑαυτοῖς τὰ συμφέροντα ἐπηρεάζουσιν ἀλλήλοις καὶ φθονοῦσιν ἑαυτοῖς μᾶλλον ἢ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις, μάλιστα δὲ πάντων ἔν τε ταῖς ἰδίαις συνόδοις καὶ ταῖς κοιναῖς διαφέρονται καὶ πλείστας δίκας ἀλλήλοις δικάζονται καὶ προαιροῦνται μᾶλλον οὕτω κερδαίνειν ἀπ' ἀλλήλων ἢ συνωφελοῦντες αὐτούς, τοῖς δὲ κοινοῖς ὥσπερ ἀλλοτρίοις χρώμενοι περὶ τούτων αὖ μάχονται καὶ ταῖς εἰς τὰ τοιαῦτα δυνάμεσι μάλιστα χαίρουσιν<sup>29</sup>;

[16] When will they reach that standard of obedience to their rulers, seeing that they make contempt of rulers a point of honour? Or when will they attain that harmony, seeing that, instead of working together for the general good, they are more envious and bitter against one another than against the rest of the world, are the most quarrelsome of men in public and private assemblies, most often go to law with one another, and would rather make profit of one another so than by mutual service, and while regarding public affairs as alien to themselves, yet fight over them too, and find their chief enjoyment in having the means to carry on such strife?<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Xenophon. *Xenophontis opera omnia*, vol. 2, 2nd edn. Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1921 (repr. 1971).

<sup>30</sup> Xenophon. *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, 4. E. C. Marchant. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA; William Heinemann, Ltd., London. 1923.

**[C.] The paradigm wrongdoer, the tyrant, has the least power and freedom. (466b-e;**

**Epictetus 4.1.51-3)**

Long continues his argument using a passage from Epictetus which focuses primarily on happiness. Epictetus writes:

Ὅταν οὖν μήτε οἱ βασιλεῖς λεγόμενοι ζῶσιν ὥς θέλουσι μήθ' οἱ φίλοι τῶν βασιλέων, τίνες ἔτι εἰσὶν ἐλεύθεροι; Ζήτηι καὶ εὐρήσεις. ἔχεις γὰρ ἀφορμὰς παρὰ τῆς φύσεως πρὸς εὕρεσιν τῆς ἀληθείας. εἰ δ' αὐτὸς οὐχ οἷός τε εἶ κατὰ ταύτας ψιλὰς πορευόμενος εὐρεῖν τὸ ἐξῆς, ἄκουσον παρὰ τῶν ἐζητηκότων. [52] τί λέγουσιν; ἀγαθὸν σοι δοκεῖ ἢ ἐλευθερία; — Τὸ μέγιστον. — Δύναται οὖν τις τοῦ μεγίστου ἀγαθοῦ τυγχάνων κακοδαιμονεῖν ἢ κακῶς πράσσειν; — Οὐ. — Ὅσους οὖν ἄν ἴδῃς κακοδαιμονοῦντας, δυσροοῦντας, πενθοῦντας, ἀποφαίνου θαρρῶν μὴ εἶναι ἐλευθέρους. — Ἀποφαίνομαι.

“Since, therefore, neither those who are called kings, nor the friends of kings live as they wish, who can be called free? Seek, and you will find; for you are furnished by nature with resources for discovering the truth. But if you are unable to discover for yourself what follows next by recourse to these resources alone, listen to those who have searched before you. What do they say? Do you consider freedom to be a good? ‘the greatest’ Can anyone then who attains this greatest good be unhappy or fare badly? ‘No’ Whoever, therefore, you see to be unhappy, woebegone, mournful, you should confidently declare not to be free. ‘I do’”<sup>31</sup>.

---

<sup>31</sup> 4.1.51-3

Long, misinterpreting the focus of Epictetus' passage, presents passages from Plato concerning primarily power as a close parallel to Epictetus' writings. In the passage by Plato which Long turns to, first, Socrates advances the claim that orators have the least power in the city. Then, Polus claims that they, in fact, have the most power, asking if it is not true that they have the power, as do tyrants, of putting people to death, confiscating their possessions, and exiling them. Plato's Socrates replies: "I say, Polus, that both orators and tyrants have the least power in their cities, as I was saying just now. For they do just about nothing they want to, though they certainly do whatever they see most fit to do"<sup>32</sup> Polus claims this is having great power and Socrates replies that Polus has claimed having power is good for its possessor, Socrates ventures, "Do you think it's good, then, if a person does whatever he sees most fit to do when he lacks intelligence? Do you call this 'having great power' too? Polus: No I do not"<sup>33</sup>.

The key passages terminologically Long references from the *Gorgias* are below:

466c

[466ξ] τί δέ; οὐχ, ὥσπερ οἱ τύραννοι, ἀποκτεινύασιν τε ὃν ἄν βούλωνται, καὶ ἀφαιροῦνται χρήματα καὶ ἐκβάλλουσιν ἐκ τῶν πόλεων ὃν ἄν δοκῇ αὐτοῖς;

[466c]

### **Polus**

What? Are they not like the despots, in putting to death anyone they please, and

---

<sup>32</sup> 466d-e

<sup>33</sup> 466d-e

depriving anyone of his property and expelling him from their cities as they may think fit?<sup>34</sup>

[466δ] οἱ ῥήτορες οὕς ἄν βούλωνται, ὥσπερ οἱ τύραννοι, καὶ χρήματα ἀφαιροῦνται καὶ ἐξελαύνουσιν ἐκ τῶν πόλεων ὃν ἄν δοκῇ αὐτοῖς;”

### **Socrates**

Were you not this moment saying something like this: Is it not the case that the orators put to death anyone they wish, like the despots, and deprive people of property and expel them from their cities as they may think fit?

The key terms in the Epictetus passage are θέλουσι and ἐλεύθεροι, for wishing and freedom from. The key terms in the Plato passages are βούλωνται and δοκῇ, for what one desires and what not what one wishes and what one considers best. Although in translation the meanings appear similar, the terms used do not match, thus casting doubt on any claims asserting direct inspiration. Furthermore, the terms used for rulers are different: Plato uses τύραννοι while Epictetus opts for βασιλεῖς. In the cases of θέλουσι and βούλωνται, and τύραννοι and βασιλεῖς, the meaning is largely the same, however I maintain it is important to note there is no absolutely direct paraphrasing occurring. The key difference is Epictetus’ use of ἐλεύθεροι. Freedom is established to be the greatest good and intrinsically tied to one’s happiness. The entire concept is noticeably lacking in the Plato passage, and thus one must conclude that this central concept was not inspired by Plato’s Socrates.

---

<sup>34</sup> Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 3 translated by W.R.M. Lamb. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1967.

The Platonic argument centers around intelligence as the gauge of whether or not one acts for the good, whereas Epictetus uses happiness. Additionally, Plato's writing focuses much more heavily on the role of power, which Long draws into his argument, but which, is, in fact, not present in the passage by Epictetus. While Epictetus does reference kings, his focus is on happiness as it relates to freedom and not power.

The implications of Socrates in the Gorgias passage is that those who have power have subconscious desires, presumably related to aspiring towards the good, that are not fulfilled, while at the same time they consciously do fulfill the desires they are aware of; this is how those in power do not act as they want but do act as they see fit. Real power here would be fulfilling subconscious desires for the good instead. In the Epictetus passage the power that kings and their associates wield is irrelevant, the question is about freedom. Freedom in the Stoic sense, and certainly for Epictetus, requires no power over external affairs. See, for example, the opening chapter of the *Discourses*, where Epictetus asserts: "the gods have placed this **alone** in our own power, the most excellent faculty of all which rules all the others, the power to deal rightly with our impressions, whilst all the others they have not placed in our power"<sup>35</sup>. If kings and their friends are not free and happy, according to Epictetus, he means simply and *only* that they do not properly judge impressions; acting as one "truly" wants with regard to external affairs is beyond the scope of what is in one's own power.

Xenophon's passage below presents a picture in which only those who understand virtue truly have choice, and the ability to choose what they want, and thus aim at the good. Therefore others, while appearing to have choice, or using Epictetus' term, freedom, in fact do possess choice, and instead are slaves to their passions, which must

---

<sup>35</sup> 1.7



ultimately make them unhappy, as they are ignorant of what they truly desire: real and true goodness. Xenophon writes: “Just actions and any others proceeding from a virtuous motive were truly good; those who knew how to do them would choose to do nothing else, and those who did not understand them could not do them, and, if they tried to, failed”<sup>36</sup>. The Greek term Xenophon uses, translated here as choose, is *προελέσθαι*, that is to choose deliberately, produce or prefer. Those who understand just actions prefer nothing else and will do nothing else. Epictetus’ understanding of freedom is that it is our ability to deal correctly with impressions, in the Greek he states this power is: *τὴν χρῆσιν τὴν ὀρθὴν ταῖς φαντασίαις*, or right (from *ὀρθήν*) use of employment of impressions. I venture that these two are much more closely linked than the Plato passage where the important terms are *βούλωνται* and *δοκῆν*, for wishing and how one considers.

Furthermore, Xenophon also references “unquestionable good”: “‘It looks as if the most unquestionable good is happiness, Socrates.’ ‘Provided that it isn’t composed of questionable goods Euthydemus. ‘Why, what constituent of happiness could be questionable?’ ‘None- unless we include in it beauty or strength or wealth or fame or something else of that kind’ ‘...wealth often causes ruin through self-indulgence or the covetousness of others; fame and political power often lead to great calamities’”<sup>37</sup>. Socrates here is not rejecting happiness as the important gauge of goodness, but the common conception of it, which includes wealth and power- the things that Epictetus’ kings and friends of kings possess most principally, and which keeps them from choosing the good and thus being free. From the first Epictetus passage, we know that for him freedom is the unquestionable good and the source of happiness, and from the second

---

<sup>36</sup> 3.9

<sup>37</sup> 4.2.32-38

Epictetus passage we know that freedom is our power to correctly judge impressions. Here Xenophon's Socrates affirms that happiness is the greatest good, as long as its constituents are not things that Epictetus would assert we have no freedom concerning or power over: wealth, power and the like.

**[D.] Every action is motivated by a desire for the good. (468b; Epictetus 1.18.1-2; 3.3.2-4)**

Long draws upon two passages in Epictetus that focus on desires and good actions when furthering his argument that Epictetus relied solely upon Plato as his source. Epictetus writes: "If what the philosophers say be true....so also in the case of impulse towards a thing, the feeling that it conduces to my advantage, and that it is impossible to judge one thing to be advantageous and desire another, and to judge one thing appropriate and be impelled to the other"<sup>38</sup>. The important focal point within this passage is the reference to impulses—Epictetus here focuses on the problematic nature of conflicts between what one may be impulsively driven to do and what one finds advantageous and appropriate. The second passage Long uses is: "Now as it is the nature of every soul to assent to what is true and dissent from what is false, and suspend judgment in matters of uncertainty, it must be its nature likewise to be moved by desire for what is good, aversion from what is evil, and a neutral disposition towards what is neither good nor evil....Immediately the good appears, it draws the soul towards it and by evil the soul is repelled....A soul will never reject a clear impression of the good"<sup>39</sup>. Similarly, this passage suggests that human nature will draw humans towards good actions and away

---

<sup>38</sup> 1.18.1-2

<sup>39</sup> 3.3.2-4

from evil actions. The passage from Plato, which Long cites as a parallel, broadly addresses why humans act: “Now whenever people do things, do they do these intermediate things for the sake of the good ones, or the good things for the sake of the intermediate ones? Polus: The intermediate things for the sake of the good ones, surely<sup>40</sup>.” Socrates provides several examples, then concludes, “Hence it’s for the sake of what’s good that those who do all these things do them”<sup>41</sup>. Plato’s Socrates portrays motivation here in a complex manner, one not reflected in Epictetus’ passages. He is asserting that when one acts, one already has a higher good in mind, and choice of intermediates is based on a desire for this higher good. Epictetus posits instead the existence of three kinds of things: good, neutral, and evil. The soul is always clearly drawn to choose the good, rejects the evil, and has no moral position with regard to the intermediate. Thus what is good is simply good for Epictetus and therefore choice worthy, whereas Plato’s Socrates wants to allow for action towards something that is intermediately good. The two conceptions are different and those who respectively employ them will make choices in a different manner.

Xenophon’s writing, on the other hand, relies heavily upon the idea of self-indulgence, which bears closer relation to how Epictetus frames actions and impulses: “So self-indulgent people endure the worst form of slavery? That is my opinion. Don’t you think that self-indulgence debars people from wisdom, which is the greatest good, and drives them into the opposite state? Don’t you think that, by dragging them off in pursuit of pleasure, it prevents them from studying and apprehending their real interests; and that it often confuses their perception of good and bad and makes them choose the

---

<sup>40</sup> 468b

<sup>41</sup> 468b

worse instead of the better? ”<sup>42</sup>. Xenophon’s references to the potential confusion between good and bad reflects also Epictetus’ assertion that in the absence of impulse one will not experience conflicts between what is appropriate and advantageous and what one wishes to do. One’s real interests from Xenophon’s Socrates are the plain, clear, simple goods found in Epictetus. There is no complex schema involving intermediate goods as found in Plato.

Let’s return to the first Epictetus passage, where he claimed: “If what the philosophers say is true...so also in the case of impulse towards a thing, the feeling that it conduces to my advantage , and that it is impossible to judge one thing to be advantageous and desire another, and to judge one thing appropriate and be impelled to the other”<sup>43</sup>. I suggest a clear source of this is Xenophon’s Socrates in the Memorabilia, when he states: “For I think that all men have a choice between various courses, and choose and follow the one which they think conduces most to their advantage”<sup>44</sup>. Both passages explicitly assert that one chooses what one believes is conducive to advantage, which is a claim not found in the Plato passage.

Examining the key passages in Greek again reveals differences between Plato and Epictetus:

468b

### **Σωκράτης**

Ἔνεκ’ ἄρα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἅπαντα ταῦτα ποιοῦσιν οἱ ποιοῦντες.

### **Socrates**

So it is for the sake of the good that the doers of all these things do them?

---

<sup>42</sup> 4.5.8

<sup>43</sup> 1.18.1-2

<sup>44</sup> 3.9.4 I chose the Marchant translation here: Xenophon. Xenophon in Seven Volumes, 4. E. C. Marchant. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA; William Heinemann, Ltd., London. 1923.

It is eneka agathou, for the sake of the good, that one does everything one does; a very brief explanation on the part of Plato's Socrates which contrasts with Epictetus' assertions. A complex psychology of action is again what Plato appears to have in mind: it is not enough that something may be good in itself, but one must act with a mind towards a thing's help in attaining THE good. This psychology of action is not reflected in Epictetus:

Epictetus 1.18.1-2

**Ὅτι οὐ δεῖ χαλεπαίνειν τοῖς ἀμαρτανομένοις.**

Εἰ ἀληθές ἐστι τὸ ὑπὸ τῶν φιλοσόφων λεγόμενον ὅτι πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις μία ἀρχὴ καθάπερ τοῦ συγκαταθέσθαι τὸ παθεῖν ὅτι ὑπάρχει καὶ τοῦ ἀνανεῦσαι τὸ παθεῖν ὅτι οὐχ ὑπάρχει καὶ νῆ Δία τοῦ ἐπισχεῖν τὸ παθεῖν ὅτι ἀδελόν ἐστιν, οὕτως καὶ τοῦ ὀρμῆσαι ἐπὶ [2] τι τὸ παθεῖν ὅτι ἐμοὶ συμφέρει, ἀμήχανον δ' ἄλλο μὲν κρίνειν τὸ συμφέρον, ἄλλου δ' ὀρέγεσθαι καὶ ἄλλο μὲν κρίνειν καθήκον, ἐπ' ἄλλο δὲ ὀρμᾶν, τί ἔτι τοῖς πολλοῖς χαλεπαίνομεν;

If what philosophers say is true, that all men have one principle, as in the case of assent the persuasion that a thing is so, and in the case of dissent the persuasion that a thing is not so, and in the case of a suspense of judgment the persuasion that a thing is uncertain, so also in the case of a movement towards any thing the persuasion that a thing is for a man's advantage, and it is impossible to think that one thing is advantageous and to desire another, and to judge one thing to be proper and to move towards another, why then are we angry with the many?

None of the language here is similar to the Plato passage, instead we have judgment, krinein, of benefit, sumpheron, and there is no language related to doing things for the sake of the good but instead what one judges will benefit oneself. The motivation and psychology of action here is universal: every human judges whether their soul moves towards, perhaps better understood as approves of, beneficial things. Epictetus' language is controlled on this matter because he is a determinist; one has no actual influence over action itself. Each individual thing is considered this way, if Epictetus' intent was that one is drawn to THE good itself, and not the good of a particular thing, he would be sorely remiss in not stating so.

Epictetus 3.3.2-4

[2] πέφυκεν δὲ πᾶσα ψυχὴ ὥσπερ τῷ ἀληθεῖ ἐπινεύειν, πρὸς τὸ ψεῦδος ἀνανεύειν, πρὸς τὸ ἄδηλον ἐπέχειν, οὕτως πρὸς μὲν τὸ ἀγαθὸν ὀρεκτικῶς κινεῖσθαι

and as it is the nature of every soul to assent to the truth, to dissent from the false, and to remain in suspense as to that which is uncertain; so it is its nature to be moved towards the desire of the good

Here Epictetus again differs, asserting the soul is moved toward desiring the good, τὸ ἀγαθὸν ὀρεκτικῶς κινεῖσθαι, not claiming one acts for the sake of the good. One cannot act for the sake of the good because one has no control over external action. A Stoic human can only affirm judgments of good, this is where Stoic freedom lies, such as it is.

**[E.] (as a corollary of D): No one does or wants what is bad, knowing or thinking that what he does or wants is bad [i.e. wrongdoing is involuntary]. (468d; Epictetus 2.26.1-2)**

Long adds to his argument using a passage from Epictetus concerning acting in error, or doing wrong: “Every error implies a contradiction: for, since the man who errs does not wish to err, but to act rightly, it is evident that he is not doing what he wishes. For what does a thief wish to achieve? His own interest. If, then, thieving is against his interest, he is not doing what he wishes”<sup>45</sup>. In this passage, Epictetus focuses on one’s own interest again, as did Xenophon’s Socrates in the passage quoted above (4.5.8), where he states that: “don’t you think that, by dragging them off in pursuit of pleasure, it [self-indulgence] prevents them from studying and apprehending their real interests”. Long identifies a passage from Plato as a parallel: “If a person who’s a tyrant or an orator puts somebody to death or exiles him or confiscates his property because he supposes that doing so is better for himself when actually it’s worse, this person, I take it, is doing what he sees fit, isn’t he? Polus: Yes. Socrates: And is he also doing what he wants, if these things are actually bad? Why don’t you answer? Polus: All right, I don’t think he’s doing what he wants”<sup>46</sup>.

Here Epictetus is consistent with earlier passages: the thief’s motivation is to act for his own interest, which is the natural goal of all. In the Plato, the claim is that the ruler is not doing what he wants because the actions are actually bad in themselves. It is this fact that makes it not what one wishes, whereas for Epictetus’ thief it is simply that it turns out thieving is not beneficial. Deeper moral considerations are not a factor, despite

---

<sup>45</sup> 2.26.1-2

<sup>46</sup> 468d

the rather misleading translation implying that one does not act “rightly” when they err. Epictetus actually writes: οὐ θέλει ἁμαρτάνειν, ἀλλὰ κατορθῶσαι, or the thief does not wish to fail, but succeed.

**[F.] (as a further corollary of D): The wrongdoer does not do what he wants, but what (mistakenly) ‘seems good to him’ (468; Epictetus 4.1.3)**

Long focuses on another passage in Epictetus that addresses the lives of “bad” men: “No bad man then, lives as he likes; and neither is he free”<sup>47</sup>. He identifies the following passage from Plato as a close parallel: “So, what I was saying is true, when I said that it is possible for a man who does in his city what he sees fit not to have great power, nor to be doing what he wants”<sup>48</sup>. Again, the passage that Long chooses focuses more squarely on power than on good and bad actions. Long cites the entirety of 468 as his inspiration for source F where, as we saw earlier, the key assertion is that one does things for the sake of the good, *eneka agathou*. The only noteworthy addition not yet discussed comes from the following line:

**468e**

**Σωκράτης**

ἀληθῆ ἄρα ἐγὼ ἔλεγον, λέγων ὅτι ἔστιν ἄνθρωπον ποιοῦντα ἐν πόλει ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτῷ μὴ μέγα δύνασθαι μηδὲ ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται.

---

<sup>47</sup> 4.1.3

<sup>48</sup> 468



The idea here is that it is possible to do what one sees fit without having great power or doing what one wishes. Epictetus does use βούλεται for wish in the key passage here, however his overriding point is different:

Epictetus 4.1.3

[3] — Οὐδεὶς. — Οὐδεὶς ἄρα τῶν φαύλων ζῆ ὥς βούλεται: οὐ τοίνυν οὐδ' ἐλεύθερός ἐστιν.

Not one then of the bad lives as he wishes; nor is he then free.

None of the low, τῶν φαύλων, live as they wish, and they lack freedom. Freedom for Epictetus is the power to judge impressions correctly, as was established earlier, living as one wishes is recognition and embodiment of this as well as regarding one's own interest chiefly, also established earlier. To **live** as one wishes here is ζῆ ὥς βούλεται, in Plato we have to **do** what one sees fit, ποιοῦντα ἐν πόλει ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτοῖς, and **not to do** what one wishes, ποιεῖν ἃ βούλεται. Again, Plato is suggesting a more complex psychology of action, whereas Epictetus does not allow considerations of Plato's δύνασθαι, power or ability, to be relevant at all. In the Plato, it is established that one does things again for the sake of the good, eneka agathou, and one can do what he sees fit, without having great power (mega dunasthai) or doing as he wishes (bouletai poiein) in Epictetus it is simply stated that none of the phaulo^n (low) lives as he wishes, or is

free (eleutheros). Xenophon's Socrates emphasizes that knowledge of what one wants to achieve is the key to living as one wishes, stating:

πειρῶ κατεργάσασθαι ὥς μάλιστα τὸ εἰδέναι ἃ βούλει πράττειν

“try to ensure as far as possible that you know about the things that you want to do”<sup>49</sup>.

The focus for both Epictetus and Xenophon's Socrates is on knowledge concerning what is in one's interest or to one's benefit.

**[G.] Untended diseases of the soul leave ineradicable imprints. (525a; Epictetus 2.18.11)”**

Long's final passage which he parallels to Plato focuses on sickness of the mind: “...and something similar happens in the sickness of the mind too. Certain traces and weals are left behind in it, which, unless the person concerned expunges them utterly, the next time he is flogged in the same place, not weals but wounds are created”<sup>50</sup>. Long quotes Plato, who writes: “Rhadamanthus brings them to a halt and studies each person's soul without knowing whose it is. He's often gotten hold of the Great King, or some other king or potentate, and noticed that there's nothing sound in his soul but that it's been thoroughly whipped and covered with scars, the results of acts of perjury and of injustice, things that each of his actions has stamped upon his soul. Everything was warped as a result of deception and pretense, and nothing was straight, all because the soul had been nurtured without truth. And he saw that the soul was full of distortion and ugliness due to

<sup>49</sup> 3.6.18

<sup>50</sup> 2.18.11

license and luxury, arrogance and incontinence in its actions”<sup>51</sup>. While this is an appropriate passage as it includes a description of the scarring that can occur to one’s soul, it is not the only potential source material for Epictetus’ passage. Specifically, Xenophon writes: “Or who could escape degradation both of body and of mind if he is a slave to his appetites? ...a man who is a slave to such pleasures ought to pray to the gods that he may find good masters; for that is the only way in which such a person may be saved”<sup>52</sup>. In this case, both Xenophon and Epictetus are emphasizing the terrible state of the soul\mind. When Epictetus describes the “sickness of the mind” this can be seen as quite parallel to Xenophon’s “degradation of ... mind”. Thus, Epictetus’ writing, again, while it may be related to the passages of Plato which Long has chosen, also bears striking resemblance to Xenophon’s writing as well.

Thus, Long proposes that each of these seven propositions can be traced back precisely and solely to Plato’s writing alone. However, as has been shown, Xenophon’s writings often present an equally similar, if not stronger parallel to Epictetus’ text. Long’s claim that Epictetus relied upon only Plato, then, appears to be narrow-minded, as Xenophon is as likely a candidate for Epictetus’ source material.

Closely examining the original Greek of the last of the seven points again shows key terminological differences between the work of Epictetus and Plato. Further, a similarity can be found between the work of Xenophon and Epictetus.

Gorgias 525a

---

<sup>51</sup> 525a

<sup>52</sup> 1.5

[525a] ἃ ἐκάστη ἡ πράξις αὐτοῦ ἐξωμόρξατο εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν, καὶ πάντα σκολιὰ ὑπὸ ψεύδους καὶ ἀλαζονείας καὶ οὐδὲν εὐθὺ διὰ τὸ ἄνευ ἀληθείας τεθράφθαι: καὶ ὑπὸ ἐξουσίας καὶ τρυφῆς καὶ ὕβρεως καὶ ἀκρατίας τῶν πράξεων ἀσυμμετρίας τε καὶ αἰσχροτήτος γέμουσαν τὴν ψυχὴν εἶδεν: ἰδὼν δὲ ἀτίμως ταύτην ἀπέπεμψεν εὐθὺ τῆς φρουρᾶς, οἷ μέλλει ἐλθοῦσα ἀνατλῆναι τὰ προσήκοντα πάθη.

[525a] where every act has left its smirch upon his soul, where all is awry through falsehood and imposture, and nothing straight because of a nurture that knew not truth<sup>53</sup>: or, as the result of an unbridled course of fastidiousness, insolence, and incontinence, he finds the soul full fraught with disproportion and ugliness. Beholding this he sends it away in dishonor straight to the place of custody, where on its arrival it is to endure the sufferings that are fitting

Epictetus 2.18.11

[11] τοιοῦτόν τι καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν τῆς ψυχῆς παθῶν γίνεται. ἴχνη τινὰ καὶ μώλωπες ἀπολείπονται ἐν αὐτῇ, οὓς εἰ μή τις ἐξαλείψῃ καλῶς, πάλιν κατὰ τῶν αὐτῶν μαστιγωθεὶς οὐκέτι μώλωπας, ἀλλ' ἔλκη ποιεῖ. εἰ οὖν θέλεις μὴ εἶναι ὀργίλος,

Something of the kind happens also in diseases of the soul. Certain traces and blisters are left in it, and unless a man shall completely efface them, when he is

<sup>53</sup> A more modern translation, employed by Cooper, is: "that each of his actions has stamped on his soul. Everything was warped as a result of deception and pretense, and nothing was straight, all because the soul had been nurtured without truth"

again lashed on the same places, the lash will produce not blisters (weals) but sores.

### Mem 1.5

ἀλλὰ μὴν εἴ γε μηδὲ δοῦλον ἀκρατῇ δεξαίμεθ' ἄν, πῶς οὐκ ἄξιον αὐτόν γε φυλάσσασθαι τοιοῦτον γενέσθαι; καὶ γὰρ οὐχ ὥσπερ οἱ πλεονέκται τῶν ἄλλων ἀφαιρούμενοι χρήματα ἑαυτοῦς δοκοῦσι πλουτίζειν, οὕτως ὁ ἀκρατῆς τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις βλαβερός, ἑαυτῷ δ' ὠφέλιμος, ἀλλὰ κακοῦργος μὲν τῶν ἄλλων, ἑαυτοῦ δὲ πολὺ κακουργότερος, εἴ γε κακουργότατόν ἐστι μὴ μόνον τὸν οἶκον τὸν ἑαυτοῦ φθείρειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν:

[3] Surely then, if we should refuse a vicious slave, the master must look to it that he does not grow vicious himself? For whereas the covetous, by robbing other men of their goods, seem to enrich themselves, a vicious man reaps no advantage from the harm he does to others. If he is a worker of mischief to others, he brings much greater mischief on himself, if indeed the greatest mischief of all is to ruin not one's home merely, but the body and the soul.

The phrase in Plato is: ἐξωμόρξατο εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν, or imprinted on the soul, whereas in Epictetus it is: ψυχῆς παθῶν γίνεται. Ἰχνη τινὰ καὶ μώλωπες ἀπολείπονται, or in sufferings of the soul, some tracks or marks or bruises are left behind. The mental images evoked by all three passages are peculiar, however I think the one from Plato is quite different from the others. The imprint on the soul mentioned is meant to be a sign of a poor soul to the gods, whereas in the other two passages the notion is more pragmatic: these tracks or bruises become engrained in one's being, and help one further habituate

poor judgment. In the *Memorabilia*, the idea is that when one acts wrongly one not only acts to trouble oneself but φθείρειν, to destroy, καὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν, both body and soul, and in Epictetus it is emphasized that once these marks are left, upon being revisited they become even worse than before.

### **Socratic elenchus in the Discourses**

Long continues his argument that Epictetus drew upon Plato as his primary source by suggesting that Epictetus imitates the Socratic elenchus found in Plato. Long explains: “Elenchus is Plato’s name for Socrates’ method of asking questions with a view to eliciting his interlocutors’ opinions about a moral concept, examining their answers, and showing (typically) that they are radically confused and therefore do not know what they thought they knew”<sup>54</sup>. Long goes on to present Epictetus as using elenchus in a few key passages: “[Epictetus’ assumption is] crucial to our understanding of why he appropriated the Socratic elenchus. It may be stated as follows: human beings are innately equipped with the motivation to seek their own good, i.e. happiness, and to choose whatever means they think will promote that good. I will explain this assumption after we have observed his use of it in two elenctic passages.” Long attempts to illustrate this using two examples, the first a passage discussing Euripides’ Medea, and the second a conversation between Epictetus’ and a politician who has fled his home in anguish over the illness of a child. Epictetus’ point in these passages is to show that no one willingly chooses wrong, but instead misjudges. Long claims these passages are evidence of Epictetus using

---

<sup>54</sup> Long 55

Socratic elenchus, along the lines that he is exposing the errors of his conversant (although in the case of Medea there is no conversant). This highlights my central disagreement with his evaluation. While Epictetus certainly demonstrates throughout the *Discourses* that he encounters others and exposes their errors, he also at the same time provides insight into the correct ethical interpretation and instructs others on how they may learn to judge correctly. Ethical proscriptions and guided instruction on proper judgment are decidedly lacking in any of the “Socratic” Platonic dialogues, however it is my contention, as mentioned before, that they can certainly be found in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*. For instance, Xenophon describes Socrates as: “... leading his audience on towards true goodness”<sup>55</sup>. Further, Xenophon aims to demonstrate this throughout the *Memorabilia*, take, for example, his words introducing one such demonstration, where he writes: “let us also consider whether in discouraging his associates from [false] pretence he encouraged them to apply themselves to goodness; for he always said that there was no better road to distinction than that by which one could become good at the pursuit for which one wished to be distinguished. He used to demonstrate the truth of this statement in the following way...”<sup>56</sup>. Plato’s Socrates left his audience aware that their previous thinking was incorrect, but without guidance on how to reshape their thinking, whereas Xenophon’s Socrates led his followers to “true goodness” through ethical proscriptions and suggestions on how to judge the world. Epictetus’ acknowledged indebtedness to this approach is discussed later in this paper. For now, let us return to Long’s argument concerning the two examples mentioned above.

---

<sup>55</sup> 1.6.14

<sup>56</sup> 3.7

Epictetus analyzes the story of Medea in a manner that does include the traditional question and answer style that Long identifies as Plato's Socrates method. Long focuses on the differences between Medea as portrayed in the play and Medea as portrayed by Epictetus, suggesting: "Medea presents herself as knowingly doing what is harmful (killing her children) under the influence of passion, but Epictetus, like Socrates, denies that such an analysis of one's own motivations can ever be correct; he takes Medea, notwithstanding what she says, to be motivated by completely mistaken beliefs concerning where her own advantage lies. The passage says nothing explicitly about Medea's error being due to her suffering from conflicting beliefs, that is the clear implication"<sup>57</sup>. Long's focus here on the unique portrayal of Medea in Epictetus' writing does not wholly support his point, however. If one examines the original passage in Epictetus, it becomes clear that the structure is not precisely elenchus: "'The exact point is: she thinks that gratifying her passion and avenging herself on her husband are more advantageous than saving her children' 'Yes; but she is deceived. 'Show her clearly that she is deceived and she will not do it. But until you point this out to her, what can she follow except what appears to her [to be more advantageous]?'"<sup>58</sup>. The question and answer structure bears some surface similarity to Socratic elenchus, however no exposing of ignorance is carried out, it is merely suggested as a correct course of action.

Xenophon's Socrates is a teacher who actualizes the suggestion that one can show others they are judging incorrectly. One way in which he did this was by example, as Xenophon describes: "He [Socrates] disciplined both his mind and his body by a way of life which would enable any mortal human being who followed it to live with confidence

---

<sup>57</sup> Long 76

<sup>58</sup> 1.28.6-8



and security”<sup>59</sup>. Thus, Xenophon described a Socrates who could be and was a model for his followers.

The second passage taken up by Long to support his argument that Epictetus drew upon Plato’s elenchus regards a father with a sick child. In this passage, Epictetus portrays a man whose sick child is near death and the man flees in distress. The man suggests that anyone in his position would do the same, however Epictetus counters that abandoning his daughter was not a reasonable act. The father, Epictetus argues, fled because of a mistaken belief that this was the correct thing to do. Long provides a shortened version of the lengthy passage and places in brackets interpretations of what he finds most Socratic about it. The content of the particular passage is not so important as his interpretations, which are as follows:

1. “ [The belief to be examined]”
2. “ [Pressure on the interlocutor to clarify his terms]”
3. “ [Confession of ignorance; inducement of aporia]”
4. (text included here for clarification) “Accordingly, since our dispute is about things in accord with nature and what occurs correctly or incorrectly, what criterion do you want us to adopt? [Socratic style of analogical or inductive inference].”
5. [Further confession of ignorance and aporia]
6. [Epictetus has the father agree that misjudgment about what is good and bad is the worst kind of harm]

---

<sup>59</sup> 1.3.1

7. “Now that you are aware of this, in future you will concentrate your mind on nothing else than learning the criterion of what accords with nature and using it in order to make judgments concerning particular cases”<sup>60</sup>.

While Long claims the above arguments are examples of Platonic elenchus, I disagree for a number of reasons. First, the Socrates of Plato’s early dialogues most often ends the elenchus in *aporia*: he leaves his listeners aware that their previous thinking was incorrect, however they are not provided with a correct way to understand the scenario. However, in Epictetus’ writings, like in Xenophon’s, real conclusions are reached. For instance, Xenophon writes: “When the argument was referred back to first principles in this way, the truth became apparent to his opponents too. And when he himself was setting out a detailed argument, he used to proceed by such stages as were generally agreed, because he thought that was the infallible method of argument. Consequently, when he was talking, he used to win the agreement of his audience more than anyone else that I have known”<sup>61</sup> In this example from Xenophon, and more generally in his work, his Socrates proceeds from general preconceptions to conclusions. Plato’s Socrates, however, does not arrive at true conclusions, as he instead exposes ignorance in his interlocutors and shows that they seem to have incorrect preconceptions. Epictetus’ approach, which does lead to an understanding of the correct path, is best summarized in point 6 above: the father understands the precise nature of his misjudgment. This is quite similar to Xenophon’s presentation of Socrates, as described here: “If anybody thinks, as some of the spoken and written accounts of him have held, that Socrates, though excellent at setting people on the road to goodness, was incapable of leading them to their

---

<sup>60</sup> 78

<sup>61</sup> 4.6.11

goal, I invite him to consider not only the way in which Socrates used to question and refute (by way of correction) those who thought they knew everything, but also the way in which he used to spend the whole day in conversation with the members of his circle; and then to decide whether Socrates was capable of making his companions better men”<sup>62</sup>. In the story of the father and the ill child, Epictetus leads the man to his goal—he helps him to understand the error in his action and to rectify the situation. This is reflective of Xenophon’s Socrates, not Plato’s, who would traditionally leave his followers uncertain of how to attain their goals and only certain that what they thought they knew was in fact incorrect.

Additionally, returning to the passage about Medea from above, Epictetus suggests that if people are shown the error of their ways, they can recognize it. The ability of others to recognize their errors and improve from them is similar to how Xenophon describes Socrates’ style: “On another occasion, Antiphon asked him how it was that he expected to make others politicians when he himself did not take part in politics....Socrates retorted: ‘Which would be the more effective way for me to take part in politics – by doing so alone, or by making it my business to see that as many persons as possible are capable of taking part in it?’”<sup>63</sup> Epictetus’ writings, particularly his suggestion that Medea can change through guidance is similar to Xenophon’s representation of Socrates as desiring to aid people in becoming capable of taking part in politics. In both cases, the teacher is guiding the followers towards independence through a recognition that people can change and improve with instruction. As Xenophon writes: “It is obvious, I think, from the foregoing account, that Socrates used

---

<sup>62</sup> 1.4.3

<sup>63</sup> 1.6.14

to reveal his opinions candidly to his companions. I shall now show that he also tried to ensure that they should be self-sufficient in their appropriate activities”<sup>64</sup>. The guidance given to Medea and the father with the ill child both reflect this kind of Socrates: one who shares his opinions and provides instruction to his followers to lead them towards self-sufficiency. Finally, while for Plato, there is nothing good, helpful or instructive in the natural world Epictetus’ suggests in the passage about the father and the sick child that learning what accords with nature (in a corporeal world) is the guide to making correct judgments.

Long proceeds in his chapter to further elucidate his picture of what he considers to be Epictetus’ methodology, stating: “his essential point is that everyone is innately equipped with a moral sense, or rather a shared stock of general concepts that furnish the basic capacity for making objective discriminations between good and bad, and so on. Because people naturally have this endowment they tend to think, like his interlocutor here, that they know the specifics of goodness and happiness, or right and wrong, and can therefore make correct value judgments in particular cases. When Epictetus draws attention to the ‘conflicts’ that arise from misapplication of the natural concepts, he is referring not only to disagreements between persons but also to conflicts or contradictions that arise for the same reason within the person, like Medea”<sup>65</sup>. While Long frames this passage as being focused on methodology, in fact, this is not precisely accurate. Rather, he is, as I stated earlier, simply claiming it is possible to make others aware of errors in their judgment, and this is not distinctive enough by itself to be termed a methodological strategy employed by Plato’s Socrates and Epictetus, excepting

---

<sup>64</sup> 4.7.1

<sup>65</sup> Long 80

Xenophon's Socrates from the picture. If Long was closely analyzing the methodology of Epictetus' writing in this section, he could not draw the conclusion that Epictetus' methodology draws entirely upon Plato. While Epictetus does use the question and answer format, similar to Plato's Socrates, the details of the methodology are markedly different than the method Socrates uses in Platonic dialogues. This is precisely because Epictetus is providing advice on how one can learn to judge correctly, as was shown in the passage about Medea where Epictetus reveals that Medea could have recognized the errors in her thinking and in the passage about the father and the ill child as Epictetus shows that father coming to understand that fleeing was not a reasonable act.

Continuing his explanation, Long states: "here Epictetus makes two big claims concerning people's innate concepts of value: first, any two people have the same preconception about the same item; or, to put it logically, they agree about the connotation of a term such as 'good'. Secondly, peoples' stock of preconceptions form a mutually consistent set of evaluative concepts or meanings. We may recall his comment in the preceding passage about 'starting from those [agreed] concepts'"<sup>66</sup>. Long explains that these preconceptions are common to all because of the very broad and sparse way in which they describe their particular content. I might agree with him on this but he doesn't make much of an attempt to back up his claim.

When it comes to ethical preconceptions Long thinks his above claim is not so obviously correct. He mounts a defense on Epictetus' part to the effect that, again, in a very general way they have agreed upon positive and negative connotations. The problem is that these claims are rather content-less and do not explain how anyone, let alone everyone could generally agree about ethical terms in a meaningful way. If they did, and

---

<sup>66</sup> Long 81

if this was a marked feature of Plato's Socrates, the Socratic dialogues would not end with the participants in a state of *aporia*.

Long proceeds to claim that for Epictetus, "his task, as he sees it, is to show how people's particular value judgments are typically at odds with their ethical preconceptions, and thus people fail to achieve the happiness and correct behavior they naturally want"<sup>67</sup>. This claim is simply patently incorrect. The essential nature of ethical preconceptions, what made them have the property of universality, as both Long and Epictetus indicate, is their very broad and, as I claimed above, essentially content-less nature. Epictetus states, "preconceptions are common to all people, and one preconception does not conflict with one another....For which of us does not take it that a good thing is advantageous and choiceworthy, and something to be sought and pursued in every circumstance?"<sup>68</sup>. Long affirms this, writing, "what gives preconceptions their universality and mutual consistency is their extremely general content"<sup>69</sup>.

Long additionally focuses his argument on Epictetus' methodology, presenting it as similar to Plato's: "Both in Plato and in Epictetus elenctic discussion is a methodology that gets its participants to examine their beliefs by exposing unrecognized inconsistencies and involuntary ignorance. Plato's Socrates regularly asks his opinionated interlocutors to answer questions about 'what' some moral concept (piety or courage, for instance) 'is' with a view to subjecting their responses to elenctic examination"<sup>70</sup>. Long presents this idea of questioning and answering as the key component of Epictetus' style, as well: "Epictetus follows suit. He characterizes Socrates as a person who said that 'the

---

<sup>67</sup> Long 82

<sup>68</sup> 1.22

<sup>69</sup> 80

<sup>70</sup> 84

beginning of education’ is the ‘scrutiny of terms’ (1.17.12), and in hyperbolic but authentically Socratic style he labels anyone who fails to know what basic values are as ‘going around deaf and blind, thinking he is someone when he is nothing’ (2.24.19). More particularly, he connects the standard Socratic question, ‘What is x?’, with his own diagnosis of the way people typically err: by ‘heedlessly applying their preconceptions to particular instances’ (4.1.41; cf. 25)”<sup>71</sup>. He follows this with another quote in which Epictetus attributes wrongdoing to misapplication of preconceptions. Is this supposedly Socratic question ever really the focus in Epictetus’ work?

I instead want to claim that Epictetus’ advice for how one can avoid falling into error and judging correctly bears a much stronger resemblance to the strong truth claims offered in Xenophon’s Socratic writings. Furthermore, a more complete quote from 1.17.12 in the *Discourses*, cited above by Long, shows that it is Xenophon’s Socrates that Epictetus attributes the valuing of scrutiny of terms to: “And who is it, then, who wrote that the beginning of education is the examination of terms? Does not Socrates say that? Of whom, then, does Xenophon write, that he began with the examination of terms, to find what each of them signifies?”<sup>72</sup>. This explicit reference to Xenophon suggests strongly that Epictetus’ relied upon Xenophon directly in his writing.

Thus, Long appears to be selectively quoting from Epictetus to craft his argument. He continues in this same vein, analyzing Epictetus’s writing in a limited manner: “I should also note that Epictetus does not imitate Socrates’ use of the elenchus as an instrument for arriving at purely negative conclusions concerning the concept under investigation, as in such short Platonic dialogues as *Euthyphro*. However, the material I

---

<sup>71</sup> 84

<sup>72</sup> 1.17.12

have discussed in this chapter proves that Epictetus had an acute understanding of the positive methodology and goals of the Socratic elenchus. His main departure from it was in training his students to engage in dialogue with their individual selves and to use this as their principal instrument of moral progress”<sup>73</sup>. Regarding the former, Long has only discussed the *Gorgias* in depth, and does not demonstrate that Socratic elenchus as presented in Plato does in fact have a positive methodology. In fact, above I claimed that what he points to as methodology is not really methodology at all. I defined methodology as the means by which knowledge is imparted by a particular author to the audience. One could at best infer that his seven points from the *Gorgias* are meant to be demonstrative of positive conclusions, or perhaps positive methodology. While the former may be the case, I demonstrated above reasons to think that similar conclusions are present in Xenophon’s Socratic picture, and that Xenophon’s writings are in some cases even closer. What Long terms the positive methodology of Socratic elenchus does not lead to much at all in the way of positive conclusions, but rather merely exposes incorrect conclusions an interlocutor might hold. Where specific conclusions are reached, such as that Socrates should not flee prison but accept his punishment, are merely the result of an impasse in argument by those found lacking in knowledge, no knowledge that can be extrapolated more generally and applicably is produced. If positive inferences could be easily made from these works, one would expect ancient, medieval, and contemporary scholarship to be full of them, however in the early Socratic dialogues they are decidedly lacking. Instead what one finds are broad general claims about what Socrates or Plato (and which of the two is the correct one to attribute the claims to) held to be true.

---

<sup>73</sup> 85-86



Furthermore, Long seems committed to a picture in which one engages in dialogue with oneself, and asserts this is a tool for one's own moral improvement. He later uses the text 2.12.17-25 of the *Discourses* to back up this claim, although examining it leaves one quite puzzled as to why he does so. The text centers around Epictetus advising the necessity of approaching and attempting to assist even the wealthy and powerful in caring for their souls, despite the negative responses and reactions one might incur. What this has to do with self-improvement is entirely unclear and left unexplained. Long cites several examples from the *Discourses* where Epictetus varies his style to account for his audience, however Xenophon's Socrates is more likely to have been the inspiration than Plato's, as we do not see Plato's Socrates ever make an attempt to do anything of the sort. On the other hand, Xenophon writes that his Socrates, "was so helpful in every activity and in every way that anyone who considers the matter and estimates it fairly must see that nothing was more profitable than associating with Socrates and spending one's time with him in any place or circumstances." Even more relevant here is: "He did not approach everyone in the same way. If people thought that they were naturally talented and were scornful of instruction, he explained to them that the natures which are regarded as the best have the greatest need of training. He pointed out that the best-bred horses are spirited and impetuous, and that if they are broken in when they are quite young, they become more manageable and better than any others; but if they grow up unbroken, they are very difficult to control and worse than any others...[more animal examples]...in the same way, the best types of men, people with exceptional strength of mind and ability to carry through whatever they undertake, if they are educated and learn to do their duty, become excellent and most useful people, because

they perform a great many important services; but if they grow up uneducated and ignorant, they turn out worse and cause more harm than anybody....[more examples]” 4.1 Thus these examples from Xenophon serve to show it is likely Epictetus was imitating Socrates as described above when he sought to improve others and vary his approach according to his audience.

Long concludes his chapter by stating: “Epictetus’ greatness as a philosopher is his realization that the only ethical argument that can be suitable to human dignity is his argument that persons are shown how to apply to themselves, doing so not because they are told their duty by an authority but because they are presented with reasons they are competent to examine, test, and, if they find them cogent, internalize. Notwithstanding his Stoic identity, Epictetus drew the inspiration for his *protreptic* and proof from Plato’s Socrates”<sup>74</sup>. I have given many reasons above to doubt this claim; while Epictetus is obviously indebted to Plato’s Socrates, I have demonstrated a heavy indebtedness to Xenophon’s Socrates as well. Leaving Plato, and Long, behind I now wish to further my case by examining more close parallels between the work of Xenophon and Epictetus.

### **Direct Referencing of Xenophon**

In the following pages, I will identify passages in Epictetus’ writings which I feel clearly demonstrate influence from Xenophon’s own writings. While these passages are often not precise parallels, they serve to illustrate that Epictetus was familiar with Xenophon’s ideas and that he used those ideas in constructing his own arguments. At times, I will be able to conclude that Xenophon was clearly the sources of the idea that Epictetus is presenting. However, Epictetus did not simply draw directly from

---

<sup>74</sup> 92-93

Xenophon, or any of his sources, for that matter. Rather, he took inspiration from them and used their own ideas in developing his unique positions. Thus, not every parallel will reflect identical thinking on the part of Xenophon and Epictetus. More often, it appears that Epictetus drew upon Xenophon, but took the argument in a unique direction. What is key, though, is that Xenophon's influence can still be ascertained in the passages I will present.

Thus far, I have addressed Long's suppositions that Epictetus drew solely on Plato as his source material by providing passages drawn from Xenophon's writings which are equally plausible sources of the ideas espoused by Epictetus. However, my argument is not simply that Xenophon could also have been a source for Epictetus, but rather, that Xenophon most certainly *was* an additional source of inspiration for Epictetus. In order to support this claim, in the following section, I will provide evidence that reveals that, at times, Epictetus relied so closely upon Xenophon's writings so as to actually quote him directly and that, much more frequently, Epictetus took guidance from Xenophon's Socratic writings in terms of thematic content for his own writing.

I am not the first to identify Epictetus' reliance upon Xenophon as a source. Though not making the broad argument that I am that Epictetus did draw upon Xenophon as often or more so than he drew upon Plato, contemporary scholars have noted similarities between the texts. To begin, I turn to Jean-Baptiste Gourinat's article "Le Socrate D'Épictète". In his article, he notes a number of parallels between the two authors' writings. The first one is not a thematic parallel, but directly references Xenophon's work demonstrating Epictetus' familiarity with and valuing of Xenophon's portrayal of Socrates. Specifically, Epictetus writes: "Whereas it was the principal and

most peculiar characteristic of Socrates never to be provoked in a dispute, nor to come out with anything abusive or insolent, but to bear patiently with those who abused him, and to put an end to conflict. If you want to know how great his abilities were in this regard, read Xenophon's *Symposium*, and you will see how many disputes he ended"<sup>75</sup>. Here, we see an instance in which rather than even paraphrase Xenophon, Epictetus held such high esteem for the way in which Xenophon represented Socrates that he instead directed his readers to turn directly to Xenophon's own writing.

However, as Gourinat points out, this is not the only example of Epictetus directly guiding his readers back to Xenophon. For instance, Epictetus writes: "See in Xenophon's *Symposium*, how many quarrels he ended; and, again, how he bore with Thrasymachus, with Polus, with Callicles; how with his wife; how with his son, when he was accused by him of using sophistical arguments"<sup>76</sup>. The conversation with the son, as related in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 2.2, and 2.3, contains another example of Socrates ending disputes, as Gourinat also cites. Thus we see clear evidence of an indebtedness to Xenophon in Epictetus' understanding of Socrates. While these few instances of direct referencing of Xenophon provide important evidence that Epictetus drew upon Xenophon, there are also numerous thematic connections between the works of each

### **On Emotion**

The following passages, both focusing on envy, again demonstrate a strong influence of Xenophon on Epictetus, and again are also noted by Gourinat:

Xenophon: "Considering the nature of envy, he concluded that it was a species of distress, but not the sort that arises over the misfortunes of friends or the good

---

<sup>75</sup> Dic. 2.12.14-15

<sup>76</sup> Disc. 4.5.3

fortune of enemies; he said that only those people were envious who were distressed at the success of their friends. When some people expressed surprise that anyone who cared for a person should be vexed at his success, he reminded them that many people are so disposed towards certain others that they cannot ignore their troubles, but go to their help when they are unfortunate, and yet are annoyed when they are fortunate. This, he said, could not indeed happen to a sensible person, but was the constant experience of the foolish”<sup>77</sup>

Epictetus: “ ‘Does an envious man rejoice in his envy?’ – ‘By no means. Rather, he is pained by it.’ Thus he has moved his interlocutor by the contradiction. ‘Well, and do you think envy to be a feeling of pain at evils? Yet how can there be envy of evils?’ And so he has made his interlocutor say that envy is a feeling of pain at good things. ‘Does any one envy things that are nothing to him?’ – ‘No, surely.’” Having thus drawn from his opponent a full and distinct conception, he then departed; and did not say, ‘Define for me what envy is’, and after the man had defined it, ‘You have defined it wrong, for the definition does not correspond to the thing defined’”<sup>78</sup>.

Epictetus argues that one can only possess envy concerning good things and not evil things, which are furthermore of significance and importance to the envier. This understanding is exactly in line with the argument of Xenophon’s Socrates, presented above it, wherein he represents envy as being felt towards ones’ friends and their

---

<sup>77</sup> Mem. 3.9.8

<sup>78</sup> Disc. 2.12.7-9

successes. Though Epictetus does not specify that one may also feel envy towards one's friends, he does focus on the pain that envy causes to the one who is envious. While the simple feeling of envy may not pain one, this emotional response would be much more likely when the object of one's envy is a friend.

The similarity between the two passages and the focus given to the topic itself suggests the influence of Xenophon's Socrates.

### **On Material Possessions**

Both Xenophon and Epictetus, following Socrates' lead, advocate living a life of simplicity and limiting oneself to few possessions. Xenophon presents Socrates as: "most tolerant of cold and heat and hardships of all kinds; and finally he had so trained himself to be moderate in his requirements that he was very easily satisfied with very few possessions....He was certainly not foppish or ostentatious either in his clothing or in his footwear or in the rest of his daily life"<sup>79</sup>. Xenophon also characterizes Socrates as one who: "disciplined both his mind and his body by a way of life which would enable any mortal human being who followed it to live with confidence and security, and to have no difficulty in meeting his expenses"<sup>80</sup>. These passages bear striking resemblance to Epictetus' proclamations for how to live one's life. Specifically, Epictetus also focuses on giving up unnecessary possessions and living simply: "This is what you should practice from morning till evening, beginning with the meanest and frailest things, with an earthen vessel or a cup. Afterwards, proceed to a tunic, a dog a horse, a piece of land, and thence to yourself, your body and its parts, and your children, wife, brothers. Look

---

<sup>79</sup> Mem. 1.2

<sup>80</sup> Mem 1.3

around you in every direction, and hurl these things away from you. Purify your judgments. See that nothing is attached to you or cleaves to you that is not your own and may give you pain when it is torn away. And say while you are training yourself day after day, as you do here, not that you are pursuing philosophy (to claim that title would surely be pretentious), but that you are providing for your emancipation. For this is true freedom”<sup>81</sup>. Epictetus, following the examples set by Xenophon’s Socrates, and also unquestionably Diogenes the Cynic, is emphasizing the importance of training oneself to live a life unencumbered by concern with material possessions, and goes further to extend this training not only to material possessions but even other human beings. To argue that it is only Xenophon’s Socrates Epictetus draws on for inspiration would be incorrect; it would be similarly difficult to claim that he is inspired only by Diogenes.

### **On Freedom**

Epictetus does not only espouse this parallel thinking to Xenophon’s Socrates at one point. Rather, he returns to this ideal time and time again. He also presents Diogenes the Cynic as an example of this ascetic approach to life: “Diogenes was free. – ‘How so?’ Not because he was born of free parents, for he was not, but because he was free himself, because he had cast away all that gives slavery a hold on a person, so that there was no way that anybody could come up to him or seize hold of him to enslave him. Everything he had could be easily loosed, was loosely fastened. If you had seized hold of his property, he would have let it go rather than have followed you to recover it”<sup>82</sup>. The suggestion that Diogenes would let go of his possessions rather than pursuing one who

---

<sup>81</sup> Disc. 4.1.111-113

<sup>82</sup> Disc. 1.1.152-153

had taken it suggests that he possesses true freedom: the freedom of a pure and simple life in which one holds that value is not to be attributed to one's possessions but one's character. The use of Diogenes in this passage provides direct evidence refuting Long's position that Plato's Socrates was the only influence for Epictetus. If he drew here upon Diogenes, clearly Epictetus was framing his ideas based upon more than simply Plato's Socrates.

### **On Self-Control**

We move now to examine the similar approaches used by Xenophon and Epictetus when discussing self-control explicitly. Xenophon writes: "If self-control is a truly good thing for a man to possess let us consider whether Socrates gave any impulse towards it by homilies of the following kind: ....and who would appreciate the company of such a person at a social function, if he saw him caring more about the food and wine than about his friends...Surely every man ought to regard self-discipline as the foundation of moral goodness, and to cultivate in his character before anything else. Without it, who could either learn anything good or practice it to a degree worth mentioning?"<sup>83</sup> Xenophon's Socrates here emphasizes the importance of self-control, making the starting point for one's development rest in resisting indulgence in bodily pleasures. Similarly, Epictetus advocates training oneself to resist those same bodily pleasures: "Lay down from this moment a certain character and pattern of behavior for yourself, which you will preserve when you are alone and also when you are in company....In things relating to the body take just so much as bare need requires, that is to say, in things such as meat, drink, clothing, housing and household slaves. But cut out everything that is for show and luxury....When you are going to meet with any one...put

---

<sup>83</sup> Mem 1.5



the question to yourself, ‘What would Socrates or Zeno have done in this situation?’, and you will not be at a loss to make a proper use of the occasion”<sup>84</sup>. While Xenophon explicitly links the idea of self-discipline or control to good virtue, and Epictetus aims to present a more broad picture of a “certain character and pattern of behavior” it is clear that both writers value controlling one’s excesses. Self-control is at the core of the pattern and character Epictetus urges one to develop, and he goes so far as to directly point to Socrates as an example from which one might establish this habit.

While at times Epictetus directly references Xenophon, at other points, he provides examples which parallel those of Xenophon’s Socrates. For instance, he says: “Remember that you must behave in life as you do at a symposium. Something is being passed round and comes to you: put out your hand take your share politely. It goes by: do not detain it. It has not yet come: do not stretch your desire out towards it, but wait till it comes to you”<sup>85</sup>. Epictetus modifies Xenophon’s example in the passage where Socrates criticized those focused too much on food and drink at events like banquets by providing a proscriptive about taking only your share politely. Additionally, Epictetus “used to say that there are two vices which are much more important and offensive than all the others: namely the inability to put up with things and to control oneself; that is when we do not put up with and bear things that we should bear, and when we do not keep away from those objects and pleasures which we should keep away from”<sup>86</sup>. Here, he again draws on Xenophon’s Socrates and influence when he critiques the “inability to control oneself.” Thus the attention to training and self-discipline that is so characteristic and oft

---

<sup>84</sup> Handbook 33:

<sup>85</sup> Handbook 15

<sup>86</sup> Fragments 10

discussed in Epictetus' work appears to have its basis in the example set by Xenophon's Socrates.

### **On Training and Practice**

Xenophon spends a significant amount of time discussing the necessity of both training and practice of virtue. For instance, Xenophon's Socrates indicates that in order to maintain one's moral character and avoid a regress, one must regularly exercise and practice virtuous acts: "No doubt many professed philosophers would say that a just man can never become unjust, nor a self-disciplined man a bully, just as one who has learned any other subject can never become ignorant of it. But this is not my view of the matter. It seems clear to me that just as those who do not exercise their bodies cannot carry out their physical duties, so those who do not exercise their characters cannot carry out their moral duties: they can neither do what they ought nor avoid what they ought to avoid. That is why fathers keep their sons...away from bad men, because they believe that the company of good people is a training in virtue, while the company of bad men is the ruin of it"<sup>87</sup>. Epictetus appears to have taken Socrates' advice here into consideration when he speaks of acting properly: "Never call yourself a philosopher, nor talk a great deal amongst laymen about philosophical principles, but do what follows from those principles. Thus, at a banquet, do not say how people ought to eat, but eat as one ought. For remember how Socrates had so completely set aside all ostentation that when people came to him wanting to be introduced by him to philosophers, he took them along and

---

<sup>87</sup> Mem 1.2.19

introduced them, so well did he bear being overlooked”<sup>88</sup>. These passages bear similarity, but are not identical: specifically, while Xenophon argues that living in this way is important to maintain one’s moral character and virtue, Epictetus is more focused on following through with your principles and doing the right thing. Epictetus wants his followers to go beyond calling themselves philosophers, and rather act in the correct manner. While not identical, this is similar to Xenophon’s encouragement to exercise your character. The important part of being the person you would like to be is in practicing and acting in the correct manner. Both Xenophon and Epictetus here are reacting against the environments in which they find themselves in which they are dissatisfied with those who profess to be devotees of philosophy, but occupy themselves with largely theoretical concerns and rhetorical flourish, rather than living their philosophy. Though it may not be that Epictetus drew only upon Xenophon in this passage, it is important to note that both writers seem focused on avoiding hypocrisy that they may see others around them practicing. The negative public image surrounding such hypocrisy helped condemn Socrates, and continued to plague philosophers for centuries afterwards, as Epictetus is keenly aware.

Xenophon further develops his position on the importance of working to improve yourself. His Socrates instructs: “Critobulus: if you want to be thought good at anything, the shortest, safest, and most reputable way is to try to make yourself really good at it. If you consider the virtues that are recognized among human beings, you will find that they are all increased by study and practice”<sup>89</sup>. Epictetus takes Xenophon’s suggestion that you must try to make yourself good at what you wish to be good at and provides the

---

<sup>88</sup> Handbook 46

<sup>89</sup> Mem 2.6.33

opposite vision: if you do not continue to practice and improve yourself, you will have difficulty exhibiting the traits you wish. This can best be seen in the following passage: “When you relax your attention for a while, do not fancy you will recover it whenever you please; but remember this, that because of your fault of today your affairs must necessarily be in a worse condition on future occasions....Do you not perceive, that when you have let your mind stray, it is no longer in your power to call it back, either to propriety or self-respect or moderation?....To what, then, must I attend? Why, in the first place, to those universal principles which you must always have at hand, so that you do not sleep, or get up, or drink, or eat, or approach other men without them: that no one is master of another’s choice and it is in choice alone that good and evil lie. No one, therefore, has the power either to procure me good or to involve me in evil; but I alone have authority over myself with regard to these things”<sup>90</sup>. Here, when Epictetus writes of “relaxing your attention”, he is taking to heart Xenophon’s exhortation that one should regularly practice and maintain one’s character and virtue. Where Xenophon on the one hand proscribes a course of action, Epictetus cautions against the harm caused by failing to heed to this advice. The idea that virtue requires training had by Epictetus’ time become commonly accepted, however to trace its origin to anyone but Socrates I find implausible. That is to say, even if Epictetus’ more direct inspiration was an earlier philosopher, I would argue that earlier philosopher was in turn influenced by the example of Socrates himself.

There are times at which Epictetus is even more explicit in demonstrating his indebtedness to Xenophon’s Socrates. For instance, Xenophon writes: “On another occasion he [Socrates] was asked whether courage was a matter of teaching or a natural

---

<sup>90</sup> Disc. 4.12

gift. ‘I think,’ he said, ‘that just as one body is born with more strength than another for doing work, so one mind is naturally endowed with greater fortitude than another for facing danger....But I think that every natural disposition can be developed in the direction of fortitude by instruction and application....My personal experience is that similarly in all other cases people both differ in natural capacity and improve greatly by the help of application. From this it clearly follows that everyone, whether his natural ability is above or below the average, ought to study and exercise any qualities for which he wishes to earn recognition”<sup>91</sup>. Epictetus, in a parallel manner, describes the importance of not simply learning, but practicing. The both encourage their listeners to strive for both “instruction and application.” As Epictetus writes: “Each man is strengthened and preserved by actions that correspond to his nature....For this reason philosophers exhort us not to be contented with mere learning, but to add practice also, and then training. For we have been long accustomed to do the opposite of what we should, and the opinions that we hold and apply are the opposite of the correct ones. If, therefore, we do not also adopt and apply the correct opinions, we shall be nothing more than interpreters of the judgments of others. For who amongst us is not already able to deliver a systematic discourse on what is good and evil? That some things are good, some evil, and others indifferent: the good are virtue, and whatever partakes of virtue; the evil, the contrary; and the indifferent, riches, health, and reputation”<sup>92</sup>. In this passage, Epictetus’ encouragement to not be content “with mere learning, but to add practice also, and then training” appears to be drawing heavily on the advice of Xenophon’s Socrates; this passage also highlights a tension between Platonic doctrine and Stoic doctrine. While

---

<sup>91</sup> Mem 3.9.1

<sup>92</sup> Disc. 2.9.10-15

Plato would explicitly exclude entire classes of people from being able to use their reason in conjunction with practice and training to lead moral lives on the basis of a natural inborn incapacity the Stoics, and one could fairly infer they take their lead from Xenophon's Socrates in the passage above, instead hold to the universal promise of improvement by means of training and practice.

Finally, we also see Epictetus encourage others to act in the same way that Xenophon encourages. He imagines that one should say to himself: "I am inclined to pleasure, I will move to the opposite side of the deck to a greater extent than usual for the sake of training. I have an aversion to suffering. I will train and exercise my impressions to ensure that my aversion is withdrawn from everything of this kind. For who is the man under training? The man who practices not exercising his desire, and directing his aversion only to things that lie within the sphere of choice, and who practices the hardest the things most difficult to achieve....After desire and aversion, the second area of study has to do with your impulse to act and not to act, so that they should be obedient to reason, and not be exercised at the wrong time, or in the wrong place, or wrongly in any other respect"<sup>93</sup>. This example also reveals how deeply Epictetus has taken on Xenophon's Socrates' argument that practice and training are necessary. He provides his own examples here, guiding his listeners towards practicing even "the things most difficult to achieve." From both sources we see a continuous stressing of the importance of confronting those things that will cause one to stray from the path of virtue, starting first with a strongly ascetic approach to sensible and moving on to exercising reason to the utmost in all matters of judgment.

### **On Friendship**

---

<sup>93</sup> Disc. 3.12.6-13

A further area where Xenophon's thinking appears to be reflected in Epictetus' writing surrounds the approach which Xenophon's Socrates takes towards friendship and helping others. Specifically, Xenophon's Socrates will not, like Plato's Socrates of the early dialogues, simply expose the error of a friend or associate's current thinking, but rather will guide his friends and associates towards actual knowledge that can help them improve their lives. This same approach focused on the improvement of all who seek improvement can be found in Epictetus' work. For instance, Xenophon writes: "he believed that those of his associates who accepted the principles which he himself approved would be good friends all their life long to himself and one another"<sup>94</sup>. He continues, writing: "Socrates was obviously a friend of the people and well disposed towards all mankind...[and] shared his resources unhesitatingly with everyone....But Socrates spent his life conferring the highest benefits at his own expense upon all who wanted them, for he never let his associates go without improving them"<sup>95</sup>. Thus, Xenophon's Socrates advocates for improving others and showing others the principles by which he lived his life. He is further implicitly demonstrating solid claims to knowledge, which the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues does not.

Similarly, Epictetus approaches interacting with those who may not live upright lives, saying: "why should we still be angry at the multitude? They are thieves and robbers. What do you mean by thieves and robbers? They have gone astray in matters of good and evil. Ought we, then, to be angry with them, or to pity them? Do but show them their error, and you will see how they will amend their faults"<sup>96</sup>. By encouraging his followers to help others to amend their faults through showing them their errors,

---

<sup>94</sup> Mem 1.2

<sup>95</sup> Mem 1.2

<sup>96</sup> Disc. 1.18

Epictetus is following the lead of Xenophon's Socrates and demonstrating his own implicit claims to knowledge and understanding of virtue. Xenophon argues that the way to show others their faults is through following Socrates' model who "actually benefited his associates, partly by practical example and partly by his conversation"<sup>97</sup>. This combination of modeling good action and guidance through conversation is the approach that Epictetus, who often directs his conversations with strongly proscriptive statements, takes. It is important to stress here that Epictetus is instructing his companions with regard to how *they* should treat others. They should act *as if* appeals to reason should convince any party; that Epictetus seriously regarded such an approach as always and everywhere successful is highly doubtful, and as a proper Stoic he would accept the outcome either way. The duty to attempt to appeal to reason remains, and Epictetus would stand on principle in such cases just as Socrates himself would and did.

Both Xenophon and Epictetus see this approach to interacting with others as benefiting all around them. Specifically, Xenophon writes: "he [Socrates] obviously rid his associates of any wrong desires that they had and urged them to set their hearts on the finest and most splendid form of excellence, which makes both countries and estates well managed"<sup>98</sup>. The focus here is on guiding one's associates towards good and noble lifestyles in order to benefit all, as Xenophon says, this makes "both countries and estates well managed." A similar line of thinking can be found in Epictetus' teachings. He says: "And, more generally, he [Zeus\providence] has so constituted the nature of the rational animal, that he is unable to attain any of his own goods unless he makes some

---

<sup>97</sup> Mem 1.3

<sup>98</sup> Mem 1.2



contribution to the common good”<sup>99</sup>. Epictetus takes the idea of contributing to the common good and the importance of this type of pursuit even further, suggesting that not only is it the correct course of action, but providence has gifted all rational animals with the ability to do so.

Both figures also suggest that sharing knowledge with those around you to benefit them is an important step in living a life surrounded by good friends. Xenophon presents his argument, saying: “if anyone, by imparting any edifying knowledge that he possesses, makes a friend of one whom he knows to be naturally gifted, we consider that he is behaving as a truly good citizen should behave....As for myself, Antiphon, I take as much pleasure in good friends as other people take in a good horse or dog or bird – in fact, I take more”<sup>100</sup>. The key idea here is that when you take the time to consider others’ interests and guide them by “imparting” them with “edifying knowledge” you make good friends. Epictetus also discusses the importance of not putting your own interests first and instead recognizing that the interests of others, your friends included, are essential: “Whenever, therefore, anyone puts his interest in the same scale with sanctity, virtue, his country, parents, and friends, all these are safe; but if he puts his interest in one scale, and friends, and country, and family, and justice itself, in the other, these are all borne down by the weight of self-interest and are lost”<sup>101</sup>. When you put your own interests “in the same scale” as others, you are necessarily, going to help them in any way possible, or as Xenophon suggests, impart upon them as much knowledge as you can. Xenophon also writes that: “When his [Socrates’] friends had difficulties, if they were due to ignorance, he tried to remedy them by giving advice, and if to deficiency, by teaching them to help

---

<sup>99</sup> Disc. 1.19.13

<sup>100</sup> Mem. 1.6

<sup>101</sup> Disc. 2.22.18

one another as much as they could”<sup>102</sup>. Here we see, once again, the importance of taking your friends’ interests seriously—Xenophon suggests giving advice and teaching as the means through which one should do this. Thus, both scholars consider the gift of knowledge to be an essential one and see sharing knowledge and guiding others to be a central component to living a good life and one filled with friendships.

Both Xenophon and Epictetus expand upon their notion of friendship more generally, arguing the significance of friendships in one’s life. Xenophon describes Socrates’ approach to friendship, writing: “I once heard Socrates expressing views about friendship which I thought would be extremely helpful to anyone in the acquisition and treatment of friends. He said that although he often heard it stated that a good and sure friend was the best of all possessions, he noticed that most people gave their attention to anything rather than the acquisition of friends....Yet, if we compare a good friend with any other possession, it must be obvious that the friend is far superior....A good friend sets himself to supply all his friend’s deficiencies, whether of private property or of public service....As the occasion demands, he shares expense, joins in actions, helps to persuade, or uses compulsion....A friend is just as much a benefactor to a man as are the hands that work for him, the eyes that see for him, the ears that hear for him and the feet that carry him”<sup>103</sup>. Here, Xenophon describes how helpful friends can be to humanity.

Similarly, Epictetus expresses the beneficial nature of friendship: “But show me that you are trustworthy, a man of honor, a man who can be relied on; show me that your judgments are those of a friend; show that your vessel is not leaky and you shall see that I will not wait for you to entrust your affairs to me but I will come and entreat you to hear

---

<sup>102</sup> Mem 2.7.1

<sup>103</sup> Mem 2.4

an account of mine. For who would not make use of a good vessel? Who despises a benevolent and faithful adviser? Who will not gladly welcome somebody to share the burden of his difficulties, and, by sharing it, to make them lighter”<sup>104</sup>. Thus, where in the passages, both writers recognize the importance of aiding your friends and helping them to improve themselves, here they both also recognize the opposite: that friends can also aid one to a great degree. As Xenophon suggests, the reciprocal nature of friendships is key to both: “ ‘Very well, then,’ said Socrates, ‘if the facts are as you say, it would be well for a man to examine himself and see what he really is worth to his friends, and try to be worth as much as possible to them’”<sup>105</sup>. Epictetus has taken from the example of Xenophon’s Socrates another crucial tenet of Stoicism: seeing the interests of others as equally important as one’s own. Clearly, earlier Stoics are also a source of this view, and perhaps even more directly so than Socrates, but if one turns and questions whether the origin of such views was unique among the Stoics or began with Socrates, I would again claim the latter.

Not only do both scholars suggest that friends are mutually beneficial, but they also suggest that one should take joy in friendship, and it is to follow the example of nature itself to do so, again valuing others interests centrally. Xenophon writes: “By nature human beings have certain tendencies towards friendliness. They need one another, they feel pity, they benefit from cooperation and, realizing this, they are grateful to one another....Rivalry and passion also make for hostility; the desire to overreach is a cause of ill-feeling, and envy arouses hatred. Nevertheless, friendliness finds a way through all these obstacles and unites men who are truly good. Their moral goodness

---

<sup>104</sup> Disc. 4.13.15-16

<sup>105</sup> Mem 2.5

makes them prefer to enjoy moderate possessions and avoid tribulation rather than gain absolute power by means of war, and enables them, when hungry and thirsty to share their food and drink...It enables them not only to suppress greedy instincts and be content with a lawful share of wealth, but even to assist one another....It enables them to settle arguments not only without annoyance, but even to their mutual advantage, and to keep their tempers from rising....It rids them completely of envy, since they give their own goods into the possession of their friends, and regard their friends' property as their own"<sup>106</sup>. One of the important features of Xenophon's passage is how essential proper management of emotion is, and how this contributes to one's devotion to others.

Epictetus, following this line, also suggests the importance of expressing joy in the friends that you have: "and the world is full of friends, first the gods, then also men, who are by nature endeared to each other; and some must remain with one another and others depart, and we should rejoice in those who are with us"<sup>107</sup>. Epictetus here exhorts his listeners to take caution to control one's emotions and take joy in the natural relationships of friendship amongst mankind, while not allowing emotion to harm one's character.

Further, both Xenophon's Socrates and Epictetus stress the importance of cultivating friendship. Xenophon suggests that you should immerse yourself in the process of friendship making: "Don't lose heart, Critobulus, but try to make yourself a good man, and when you have succeeded, you can set about hunting for truly good people. Perhaps even I myself might be able to lend you a hand in the search on account of my experience in love. When I take a fancy to anyone, it's extraordinary how

---

<sup>106</sup> Mem. 2.6

<sup>107</sup> Disc. 3.24.11

completely I throw myself into getting them to reciprocate my friendship....I can see that you will feel the same need when you set your heart on making friends with people”<sup>108</sup>. The key phrase here is “how completely I throw myself into” making friends. Similarly, Epictetus advocates complete engagement with the process of making friends. He says: “in his relationships with others, he will be wholly frank and open to one who is like himself, and to one who is unlike, he will be patient, mild, gentle and forgiving as to one who is ignorant or falling into error on matters of the highest importance; he will be harsh to nobody”<sup>109</sup>. The complete openness and gentle approach Epictetus advocates is driven by the search for the good in them, the same search Xenophon’s Socrates emphasizes is a natural drive. A further example can be found in the approach Xenophon’s Socrates takes to the eager but misguided Euthydemus. Xenophon relates: “Euthydemus decided that he would never become a person of any importance unless he associated with Socrates as much as possible; and from that time onwards, he never left him unless he was obliged to, and he even copied some of Socrates’ practices. When Socrates realized that Euthydemus was in this frame of mind, he stopped teasing him and explained as simply and precisely as he could what he thought it was necessary for Euthydemus to know, and what lines of action were best for him to follow”<sup>110</sup>.

### **On Providence**

Reverence for providence and the gift of reason it has designated in humankind to cultivate and thrive are also central themes found in Xenophon and later echoed by Epictetus. Both see providence as something which is to be awed as well as figure which has given humanity those things which make humans unique. Xenophon writes: “Now,

---

<sup>108</sup> Mem 2.6

<sup>109</sup> Disc. 2.22

<sup>110</sup> Mem 4.2

God was not content with merely caring for the body; what is far more important, he also endowed man with mind in its highest form. What other animal, in the first place, has a mind that is aware of the existence of the gods, who have set in order the greatest beauty on the grandest scale? What kind of creature except man worships the gods? What mind is better able than man's to make provision against hunger or thirst, cold or heat, to relive disease or cultivate bodily strength or take pains to acquire knowledge, or to keep in memory all that it has heard or seen or learned?....Do you suppose that the gods would have implanted in man the belief that they can do good and harm, if they were really unable to do so? Do you suppose that we men have been deceived all this time and never realized this fact?"<sup>111</sup>. Within this quote, a few primary themes can be drawn: 1) a great admiration for all things created by god, with the important distinction that humans fall above all these other things 2) a focus upon providence' gift of the human mind with its great capacity for survival as well as contemplation and 3) the freedom which providence has granted humans.

There are parallels in Epictetus' words for each of these points. First, Epictetus also expresses a great admiration for all things in nature while recognizing the superiority of humanity. For instance, Epictetus lauds providence's creation saying: "For everything that happens in the universe one can readily find reason to praise providence, if one has within oneself these two qualities, the ability to see each particular event in the context of the whole, and a sense of gratitude"<sup>112</sup>. Additionally, he places a greater weight on humans in particular, saying: "Well then: each of the animals is constituted by god for a purpose....But god has introduced man into the world as a spectator of himself and of his

---

<sup>111</sup> Mem 1.4

<sup>112</sup> Disc. 1.6.1

works; and not only as a spectator, but an interpreter of them....He [man]...ought to end where nature itself has fixed our end; and that is in contemplation and understanding and a way of life in harmony with nature”<sup>113</sup>. Thus, both writers appreciate all that providence has created and see in humanity the ideal form that was created.

Additionally, Epictetus models Xenophon on the second point: that God has given man, in particular the great gift of the human mind. Epictetus says: “this constitution of our understanding, such that we are not simply impressed by sensations but choose among them, and add to them and subtract from them, and thus make combinations of them...is not even this sufficient to move certain people and dissuade them from leaving an artificer out of their scheme?”<sup>114</sup>. Epictetus’s referencing to not only being “impressed by sensations” but also able to “choose among them” is quite similar to Xenophon’s question: “What mind is better able than man’s to make provision against hunger or thirst, cold or heat, to relive disease or cultivate bodily strength or take pains to acquire knowledge, or to keep in memory all that it has heard or seen or learned?” In both cases, the philosophers recognize the important capacity of man to have free will in approaching his world. This idea comes through even more clearly in the conclusion of Xenophon’s passage, where he writes: “Do you suppose that the gods would have implanted in man the belief that they can do good and harm, if they were really unable to do so?” This idea of being able to choose to do both good and harm is striking close to Epictetus’ emphasis on freedom in human choice as part of providence’s design. Epictetus says: “and yet god has not only granted us these faculties, which enable us to endure everything...but, like a good king, and a true father, has given them to us free of all restraint, compulsion or

---

<sup>113</sup> Disc. 1.6.18-23

<sup>114</sup> Disc. 1.6.10-11

hindrance, and has put them under our complete control, not even reserving any power for himself to hinder or restrain them”<sup>115</sup>. Thus, both authors perceive God as a figure to be praised, particularly for granting humanity with the mental capacity and freedom to live complex lives.

A further example related to providence that Gourinat identifies regards Xenophon’s description of Socrates’ reasoning about the conclusion of his trial and his death. Xenophon presents Socrates as saying: “I will not go out of my way for that [death by illness or old age], especially since the alternative, as I see it, is that I will benefit at the hands of both gods and men; and if revealing the opinion I have of myself annoys the jurors, then I will be choosing to die rather than to remain alive without freedom and beg, as an alternative to death, a vastly inferior life”<sup>116</sup>. The key passage in Xenophon’s text regards Socrates willful recognition that “revealing the opinion [he] has of [himself] annoys the jurors”. In Epictetus’s writings, we find the passage: “Be content not to make entreaties: do not state in addition that you will not make entreaties, unless it be a proper time to provoke the judges deliberately, as in the case of Socrates. But if you too are preparing a peroration of this kind, why rise to speak, why answer the summons? For if you wish to be crucified, wait and the cross will come. But if reason determines that you should answer the summons and persuade the judge as best as you can, you must act accordingly, with due regard, however, to the maintenance of your true character”<sup>117</sup>. Here, Epictetus references Socrates’ intentional provocation of the jurors or judges, which, as can be seen above, is drawn from Xenophon’s representation of Socrates.

---

<sup>115</sup> Disc. 1.6.40

<sup>116</sup> Ap. (43)

<sup>117</sup> Disc. 2.2.18-20



Although the apologies of both Plato and Xenophon clearly paint a picture of Socrates deliberately provoking the jury, it is only Xenophon who explicitly focuses on this provocation, framing a much more complete discussion about this issue than did Plato. Similar to Xenophon, Epictetus engages with the idea of the provocation more thoroughly. I believe the close link here is Xenophon's Socrates emphasizing that revealing his opinion of himself is so important that in doing so he chooses death, and Epictetus emphasizes that even when one is guided by reason to argue their case, they must always keep in mind and maintain their true character. Thus, Epictetus appears to have focused on not only the provocation, but also this preservation of the representation of the self: both Epictetus and Xenophon argue for authentic presentation of oneself, even in the face of death, though it seems that Epictetus takes the idea of preservation of one's character even further than Xenophon.

Continuing with an analysis of the Socrates presented at his trial, we can see, as Gourinat also notes, an instance where Epictetus, in presenting Socrates' words, quotes directly from Xenophon's Socrates. Specifically, let us return to the following passage, addressed above as part of Long's argument: "That is why Socrates, when somebody put him in mind to prepare himself for his trial, replied, 'Do you not think, that I have been preparing myself for this with my whole life?' By what kind of preparation? 'I have preserved what was in my own power.' What do you mean? 'I have done nothing unjust, either in public or in private life'"<sup>118</sup>. The parallel in Xenophon was mentioned earlier. It occurs in his *Apology* when Hermogenes and Socrates are discussing that Socrates has not prepared a defense. Xenophon relates that, "Socrates at first replied: 'Don't you think that my whole life has been a preparation for my defense?' 'How?' 'Because I have

---

<sup>118</sup> Disc. 2.8-9

consistently done no wrong, and this, I think, is the finest preparation for my defense”<sup>119</sup>. This is a particularly insightful example, as it is clear that Epictetus was quoting from Xenophon, however, even when he draws directly upon Xenophon, he still provides his own unique approach. Specifically, he paraphrases the very end of Socrates’ quote, saying instead “I had done nothing unjust, either in public or private life.” Epictetus’ tendency to do just this, rely heavily upon a text, such as those by Xenophon, but to incorporate his own paraphrasing as well suggests the complexity of the relationship between Epictetus and his sources and the challenges associated with identifying passages as parallel. While there are some examples where Epictetus does directly quote from Xenophon, far more commonly, he uses Xenophon as inspiration or guidance more broadly.

Epictetus does not solely draw on Xenophon when referencing the trial, as Gourinat also notes. Of particular interest is the focus and importance of divination for both Xenophon and Epictetus. Xenophon’s Socrates suggests consulting a diviner when uncertain about actions: “Besides, towards his intimate friends he adopted the following line: if an action was unavoidable, he advised them to carry it out as they thought best, but where the result of an action was uncertain, he sent them to consult a diviner to see if the action should be taken”<sup>120</sup>. Likewise, in Epictetus’ writings, there appears a recommendation to “consult a diviner”: “Resort to divination, as Socrates thought right, in cases of which the whole inquiry turns upon the outcome, and in which no opportunities are afforded by reason, or any other art, to discover what lies before

---

<sup>119</sup> 41

<sup>120</sup> Mem. 1.1.7

one”<sup>121</sup>. The representation of Socrates as believing in the usefulness of divination is unique to Xenophon, and yet Epictetus also includes a Socrates who would advocate the use of a diviner. Thus, Epictetus must be heavily influenced here by the Socrates of Xenophon, in particular.

### **On Death**

The source of Epictetus’s stance on rational suicide is undoubtedly Socrates, the two share thinking about the end of life and more specifically the decision to end one’s life. Xenophon’s Socrates relates, “For I believe that the best life is lived by those who take the best care to make themselves as good as possible, and the pleasantest life by those who are most conscious that they are becoming better. Up to the present time I have felt that this was happening to me...But if I go on living, I shall probably have to pay the penalties of old age: my vision, hearing and intelligence will become impaired; I shall become in consequence slower to learn and more forgetful, and inferior to those to whom I used to be superior. Now, even if one were unconscious of this, life would not be worth living; and when one is conscious of it, surely it must make one’s life worse and more disagreeable”<sup>122</sup>. In this passage, Xenophon focuses on a few key ideas: 1) that as one ages, the body and the mind weaken, unable to aid one in living the best life possible any longer, 2) at the point when the body and mind do slow down, it is better to die than continue to live and 3) that awareness of this slowing, in particular makes life no longer worth living. His suggestion that life may not be worth living subtly advocates for the acceptability, at times, of suicide, and idea which Plato’s Socrates would reject.

---

<sup>121</sup> Handbook 32.3

<sup>122</sup> Mem 4.8

In Epictetus' writing are references which seem to have been heavily influenced by Xenophon's Socrates' thinking about aging, suicide and the end of life. For instance, Epictetus says: "It is more necessary for the soul to be cured than the body; for it is better to die than to live badly"<sup>123</sup>. Epictetus believes that the soul being ill is equivalent to living badly. He additionally suggests that dying is better than living badly. This echoes closely Xenophon's Socrates' idea of choosing not to live when the body and mind age and are no longer effective. Additionally, Epictetus says: "If you send me to a place where I cannot live in accordance with nature, I shall depart from this life"<sup>124</sup>. The not living in "accordance with nature" can be a consequence of Xenophon's Socrates description of the "penalties of old age." While Epictetus suggests that one can be sent to a place, place here should be understood more as a mental state than a physical state, as Epictetus tirelessly emphasizes that one's physical state is irrelevant.

More specifically, both writers use similar metaphors to describe the relationship between a leader and the individual. Xenophon suggests: "on board ship the passengers pay most attention to the man they regard as the most experienced sailor"<sup>125</sup>. The description of turning your attention fully to the "most experienced sailor" is reflected in Epictetus' words. Epictetus says: "When you are on a voyage, and the ship is at anchor, if you go ashore to get water you may pick up some small shellfish or vegetable on your way, but your thoughts should be fixed on the ship, and you should look back constantly in case the captain should call; and, if he calls, you must cast all these things aside, if you want to avoid being thrown into the vessel with yours legs bound like the sheep. This is the case in life also: if, instead of a vegetable or a shellfish, a wife or a child is granted

---

<sup>123</sup> Fragments 32

<sup>124</sup> Disc. 3.24.100

<sup>125</sup> Mem. 3.3

you, this need not hinder you; but if the captain calls, leave all these things and run to the ship without even looking back. And if you are old, never wander from the ship, so that when the call comes, you will not be left behind”<sup>126</sup>. Epictetus extends the metaphor, suggesting that one must be ready to listen to the call of the captain, if you have been granted prized things upon shore.

Finally, Epictetus’ metaphor harkens back to Xenophon’s description of being ready for death as you age (quoted above). Epictetus suggests that as you age, you should stay close to the ship so that you can be ready when the captain calls. In the words of both Xenophon and Epictetus can be seen similar ideas about life, death and the failings of the body and mind. As Epictetus’ says: “Our body, then, is not our own but subject to everything stronger than itself”<sup>127</sup>. Both writers, then, see that we do not always have control over what happens to us, but, both also argue that one must be responsible for taking what control one can.

Xenophon’s Socrates takes special care to emphasize that lack of self-control and discipline is not only bad for one’s moral progress but is in fact so bad that it makes one little more than a slave to one’s desires; Epictetus makes the exact point himself in the *Discourses*. Xenophon’s Socrates expressed the argument thusly: “do you think that liberty is a fine and splendid possession both for an individual and for a state?’ ‘Yes, beyond the slightest shadow of a doubt’ ‘If a man is governed by the pleasures of the body and because of them cannot act as is best, do you think that he is a free man?’ ‘Far from it’ ‘Presumably you say that because you think it is the mark of a free man to act in the best way; and consequently to have masters who you from so acting is slavish’

---

<sup>126</sup> Handbook 7

<sup>127</sup> Disc. 4.1.66

‘Absolutely’ ‘So it seems to you that those who have no self-discipline are absolutely slavish’ ‘It does indeed, naturally’....And what sort of masters do you think those are who prevent the best actions and compel the worst?’ ‘Surely the worst possible’ ‘And what do you consider to be the worst form of slavery’ ‘I think it is slavery under the worst masters’ ‘So self-indulgent people endure the worst form of slavery?’ ‘That is my opinion’ ‘Don’t you think self-indulgence debars people from wisdom , which is the greatest good?’<sup>128</sup>.

Self-indulgence here is emphasized is the key thing one must conquer in order to pursue wisdom, the ultimate goal Socrates believes all should seek.

Epictetus expresses the same doctrine in a warning and instructive manner. He states: “For he that can be subjected by man must, long before, let himself be subjected by things. He, therefore, whom neither pleasure nor pain, nor fame nor riches, can get the better of, and who is able, whenever he thinks fit, to spit his whole body into his tormentor’s face and depart from life, whose slave can he ever be? To whom is he subject?”<sup>129</sup>. Epictetus expresses that physical slavery here begins with one’s slavery to one’s own body, and is not solely defined by being enslaved by another. Freedom is to be found, despite enslavement by another, in denying oneself indulgence. This key doctrine of Epictetus clearly has a strong root in the words of Xenophon’s Socrates.

### **Conclusion**

While Long would purport that Epictetus was influenced only by Plato’s Socrates in crafting his philosophy, it is much more likely that Epictetus drew from a range of sources available to him, relying particularly on earlier Stoics, and using these sources to

---

<sup>128</sup> Mem 4.5

<sup>129</sup> Disc. 3.24

ultimately frame his unique perspective. Within a striking number of passages, however, Epictetus seems to have drawn upon Xenophon's Socrates, be it directly or passed down through the formative role Xenophon's Socrates played upon earlier Stoics. Within this paper, I have first worked to systematically review Long's assertions that key passages in Epictetus' writings are most certainly drawn directly from Plato's writings. I have introduced reason to doubt these claims by providing evidence to suggest that similar ideas are also present in Xenophon's writings, and supported this counter-argument with evidence from the original texts.

In the second half of this paper, I have identified passages where Epictetus' choice of thematic material echoes that of Xenophon's. While there are occasional direct parallels, suggesting that the only sources that Epictetus drew upon for certain passages was Xenophon, more often, there are significant similarities which do not rise to the level of exact parallels. For these passages, I would suggest that Xenophon was likely an influence, however, he may not have been the only influence. Additionally, it is important to remember that Epictetus did not simply quote from his influences, but rather, he drew upon them, taking their ideas and melding them with his own unique arguments. This leaves us with a complex challenge. In many cases the influence of Xenophon's Socrates is hinted at, but because of Epictetus' tendency to adjust or modify the ideas which influenced him and because of his likely wide range of sources, I cannot definitively conclude that Xenophon was the sole influence of many of these passages. Such an argument, that Xenophon was Epictetus' sole influence in many passages, would be as troubling as Long's assertion that Plato's Socrates was the prime source. Rather, as with most philosophers, Epictetus clearly drew upon the many voices, and texts around

him, shaping his own ideas through a patchwork of influences. What this paper argues, then is that we need to see Xenophon's Socrates as a key component of this patchwork, who provided Epictetus with paramount inspiration and guidance.



### Bibliography

- Cooper, J.M. and D.S. Hutchinson, eds. *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1997.
- Dorion, L.-A. "The Rise and Fall of the Socratic Problem," In *The Cambridge Companion To Socrates*, ed. D. Morrison (Cambridge, 2010) 15-51.
- Epictetus. *Epicteti Dissertationes ab Arriano digestae*. ed. Heinrich Schenkl. Teubner, 1916.
- Epictetus. *The Discourses, The Handbook, Fragments*. trans. R. Hard, ed. C. Gill.
- Gourinat, J.-B. "Le Socrate D'Épictète," In *Philosophie Antique 1: Figures de Socrate*. eds. Laks, A. and M. Narcy. Villeneuve d'Ascq (Nord), 2001.
- Long, A.A. *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life*. Oxford, 2002.
- Plato. *Platonis Opera*. ed. John Burnet. Oxford University Press. 1903
- Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volume*. Vol. 3 trans. W.R.M. Lamb. London, 1967.
- Xenophon. *Conversations of Socrates*. trans. H. Tredennick and R. Waterfield. Harmondsworth, 1990.
- Xenophon. *Xenophontis opera omnia*, vol. 2, 2nd edn. Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1921.
- Xenophon. *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, vol. 4. trans. E. C. Marchant. London, 1923.